

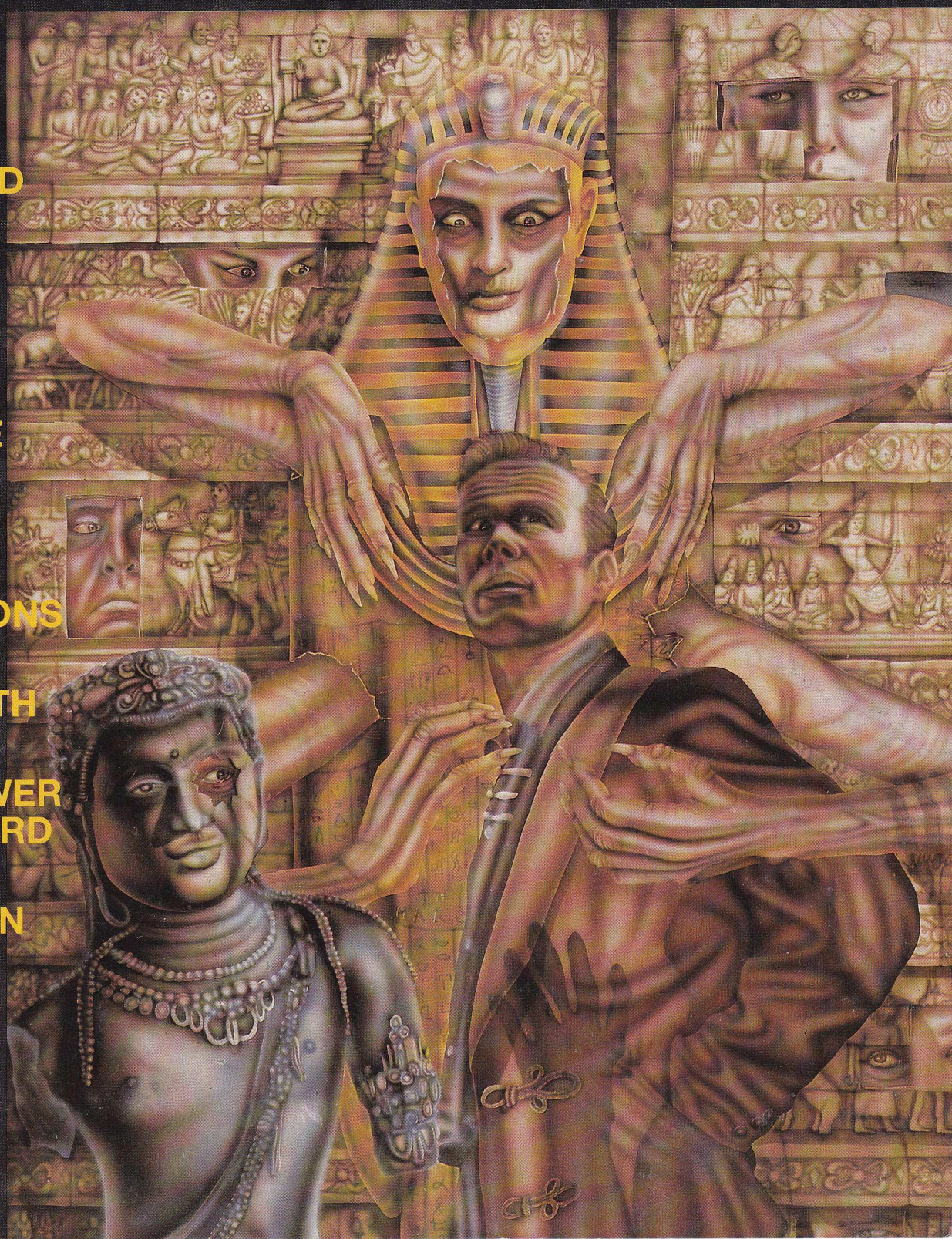
ISSUE
19

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REALMS

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Australian Realms

Issue 19, September/October 1994

The Australian Magazine of Role Playing

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Editorial Letters

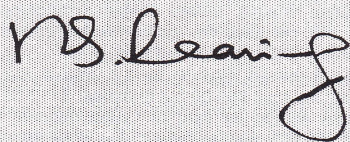
I recently finished reading a book - *Hearts of Darkness, The European Exploration of Africa* written by Frank McLynn. Now those explorers were true adventurers! The obstacles they had to overcome in their epic journeys beggar belief - wild animals, hostile tribes, tropical diseases, starvation. I tip my hat to Park, Burton, Speke, Livingston, Stanley and companions. Their travels and travails make the inconveniences of my life seem trivial. But I guess it is all a matter of scale and your point of view. To me, this "horror special issue" of *Australian Realms* has presented many challenges, challenges I don't wish to repeat.

We've had all sorts of problems - missed deadlines, illness, the A-Team Brawl going back into playtest, our AD&D coverage interrupted (see News Page), the laser printer we produce our proofs on telling us "Engine Error, Contact an Authorised Service Provider" two days before we were due to go to press (now that was scary!), the Cthulhu scenario swallowed by a shoggoth, and a host of other minor horrors. All of these things have added up to a number of broken promises from last issue. Sorry.

Hey, am I making excuses? You bet! Yet while I am saying this issue is not exactly what we had promised (no Tavern Brawl, no Ravenloft, no Cthulhu), I do believe it has turned out even better than planned! Take a quick look now to see what I mean. The format changes that we are going to implement proper next issue have begun to appear, and the material we present is some of the very best we've done to date.

In an elliptical and completely irrelevant way that only an over-tired editor could dream up, I guess putting *Australian Realms* together every two months is a bit like one of those epic journeys of exploration into the deepest darkest Africa of last century.

"The horror, the horror..."



Nick Leaning

Chris Thomas
North Ward, QLD

Dear Realmsrunners,

I have noticed a couple of things over the past three magazines. Firstly the game-specific articles seem to be narrowing their scope so that if you don't play the game the ideas (if you can follow them) aren't useful. The articles are great, they're just losing their portability. I'm a bit concerned that if they become pointless to the non-player (or, worse, the non-GM) then the magazine will suffer as individual readers find less and less in it for them.

The other notable point is the discussion on the Letters Page. Beating up orcs and aliens is not racism, they are evil incarnate and have only been created to be on the receiving end of a game where "everybody wins". How do I know this? It says so in the book! If the book said "orcs and aliens are lovable creatures of God who only steal sheep because they cannot feed their children and not for the dubious sexual practices rumoured to occur by scandal-mongers trying to foment unrest for their own devious ends" the characters would discover this, would beat up the scandal-mongers and possibly set out to rid their neighbours of the pestilence which laid waste to their home and forced them into a life of different morality. But the book doesn't say that.

The book also doesn't say that female characters are all warrior women with huge breasts and very little armour (except the *Macho Women With Guns* book, but if we can't laugh at ourselves who can we laugh at?). The book doesn't say you can't be such a person which is good because the people who want to assume such a role can play too. So what is the problem with drawing "Venus in bottlecaps and sporan" as an example of "what you can become with our book and your imagination"? Well, nothing. It's a valid choice of female character. The problem is that the woman-escaping-from-chainmail-bikini-motif appears everywhere causing a scarcity of other valid choices of female character. The implication (which MWWG turned into a game) is that female characters can only be warrior women with huge breasts and very little armour. All these bottlecapped scots goddesses propagate an attitude which stereotypes a person according to their sex (ie. they're sexist).

Any racism in a game would come from the structure of the fantasy milieu and the input of the players while sexism (which can be found in some rules despite what E. Gary Gygax wrote in the preface to 1st Ed AD&D) is in the presentation of the real world artifacts. To compare the two, as Jillian Andersen said, is silly.

Chris, your point about game specific articles is a good one. We have always aimed our coverage at those games our readers say (in the Readers Polls) they prefer, but having said that, we are reviewing our direction and coverage. We aim to be a roleplaying

resource useful to all gamers. Comments like yours keep us focused on this goal.

The sexism/racism debate continues. I still say examining our attitudes towards all negative aspects of human behaviour is warranted in roleplaying, but concede that at the end of the day a game is a game - people can and do separate their gaming activities from real life. A rule book telling you to kill orcs does not mean you will go out and kill someone from a real life racial minority. What I have seen across the roleplaying table, however, is a vicarious enjoyment of this kind of violence that seems to me to be symptomatic of something unhealthy in the psyche of those players.

Leon Braun
22 Sharnbrook Ave
Armidale, NSW 2350

Dear Realms,

My first purchase of your magazine was issue 17. "At last!" I cried, a magazine by *Australian RPGers for Australians*. And such a wonderful price too! The quality of your artists and writers is amazing. I myself believe, that here you have a magazine that could quite possibly contend with TSR's 'Dragon'. I was amazed when in issue 18 Jeremy complained that "The value for money is not... high". My only qualms with RPGing are that the good stuff costs too much, and a certain foreign country makes things very bothersome for the Ozzy market, so I should not think \$4.50 [*subscription price, Ed*] is too much to pay for 48 pages of sheer brilliance. I did however agree with him that more ads would be nice (as long as they are Australian).

I have enjoyed the, at times heated, debate on sexism in RPGs and would like to add my bit: It seems that many female gamers think that it is a male GM's fault that they often end up wearing a small, damp, white pocket handkerchief, but surely it is them that fork out the GPs and not the GM? If they feel pressured by fantasy art, they should remember it is they that chose the hobby.

I have, of late been writing war games and simple RPGs to play amongst my friends, and it was with one of these that I hit upon a very good idea. Why not instigate a 'shareware' system for amateur PBMs and RPGs, with a "you don't have to, but some money would be nice" letter attached to the rules. Any interested parties are welcome to write to me.

In spite of the fact that, when I first saw *Unae* I thought "Not another depressing RPW, where good NEVER triumphs", the Burvoy article had me thinking though. Even if there are a lot of menaces, a fair lot of the population must be happy. So in order to pronounce judgement I am writing a scenario in Burvoy and running it in the Palladium FRP. Hell, who knows I might enjoy it?

PS. If any gamers from the New England area in NSW (Armidale & Urealla especially) are interested in forming a club for the area with open games of WH40K and AD&D etc. could they please contact me (address above).

Leon, good onya, maa-ate. We also believe it is important for there to be an Australian voice in the rpg industry - especially since many overseas products are written and illustrated by Australians!. That is a fundamental reason why we began publishing Australian Realms. And now that we have got into our stride (we entered our third year of operation with issue 18) we reckon we've got a lot to offer those overseas markets, too.

Geoff Rogers
Aitkenvale, QLD

Dear Australian Realms,

The main reason for this letter is to ask for a copy of your guidelines for contributors to Realms. You have an excellent magazine that is promoting *ideas* in a first class way, such as story telling, progressive development, cause and effect and showing non-human races in a different light. Things that I've tried to promote during many gaming sessions, either as a player or running an adventure. I would like a chance to contribute as well and if its good enough, have it included in future issues. May Realms have a long life so that I can continue my subscription.

Dear Geoff, the things that you said you enjoy about Realms pretty much encapsulate what the magazine is all about - an ideas resource for roleplayers - with support like yours a long life for Realms is assured.

Matt Tolley
Hermit Park, QLD

Hi!

I've just picked up my copy of Australian Realms 18 and decided it's high time I finally got around to subscribing. Put me down for the next twelve issues!

I've been buying Realms since issue Issue 11, shocked and bewildered by the 'AUSTRALIAN' logo. I was skeptical, expecting the usual hail of propaganda and glossy advertising, a la... well, those -other- guys. Eight issues down the track and I'm still astounded by the sheer excellence and quality that your team manages to turn out with amazing regularity. Keep up the good work (and stay unlicensed - somebody has to keep the gaming megacorps honest!).

Perhaps the single greatest aspect of your publication is your loyalty and respect for your readers - your editorial staff accepts and publishes both constructive criticisms and the most shameless toadying *grin*.

together with their concerns about often controversial gaming issues. (WWwHB! Must remember that one...).

I would love the opportunity to contribute something from my endless reams of scrawl-covered foolscap to Australian Realm. Could you please forward the Written Submission Guidelines (forget the Art Guidelines - that's my wife's department!) I'm particularly interested in writing for the cyberpunk and gothic-punk genres - I sincerely doubt that I've seen or written anything that could cap the Unae fantasy world!

Congratulations, many thanks and best wished for the future!

Thanks Matt. It is a real morale booster to receive such mail. We think we have been doing a pretty good job, but we know we can do even bettercularly if we continue to listen to our readers. That is why we've been spending a lot of time recently, reviewing the magazine, and next issue we plan to relaunch with a great new format - you'll notice some changes already in this issue. The Readers Poll has told us a lot and we will be serving up more of the kind of the articles you want, with improved presentation. ■

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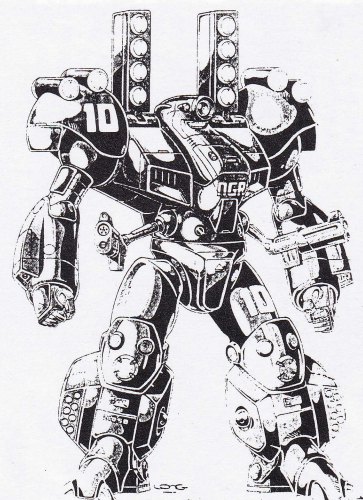
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Reviews

CASTLE FALKENSTEIN

Role Play Game & Setting

by R. Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard



Anyone who takes more than a cursory glance at this 224 page rule book cannot help but be impressed by the sumptuousness of the presentation. Every one of the dozens of illustrations scattered throughout the book is magnificent, with every second page in the first half of the book printed in glorious colour. But appearance is nothing without a solid game setting and system to back it up, criteria that **Castle Falkenstein** fortunately meet with ease.

The two halves of the **Castle Falkenstein** book serve distinct functions. The first uses the letters, sketches and paintings of the fictional character of Tom Olam (a twentieth century computer games designer, who is "kidnapped" and taken to the alternate reality of the world of **Castle Falkenstein**), to introduce the game setting, which in itself provides a wealth of gaming potential. It is the year 1870, and conventional armies share the stage with faerie hosts, steampunk dwarves, Sherlock Holmes and Captain Nemo.

The second half of the book introduces the game mechanics, with sections on developing character backgrounds, combat, duels, sorcery, lorebooks, gadgetech (hidden spy-type gadgets), engine magick (steam-powered airships etc.) and hints for "Hosts" (the *Falkenstein* name for GMs). The rules have been designed to ensure that *role-playing*, not *roll-playing* is the order of the

day. Perhaps the biggest shock for role-players is the news that **Castle Falkenstein** uses *playing cards* rather than dice to resolve situations (I can hear the jaws dropping already), a feature that works exceptionally well on.

Unfortunately, in trying to make the game as free-flowing as possible, a few minor problems have cropped up when you look at the game mechanics in detail. In two sections in particular - resolving actions and casting spells - I had great difficulty in understanding how to apply the rules. Each of these problems can easily be solved by setting some house rules before beginning play, and in no way detract from what is a very novel and playable system.

In the final analysis, if you are a player who can't operate without sets of tables to dictate every move your character makes, then you probably won't like this game. If you *have* advanced to the next stage of role-playing however, or are looking for something new to re-energise your interest in role-playing, then rush out and buy this game immediately - you won't be disappointed. On a purely personal level, this is the most inspiring and exciting role-playing release I've seen in many a year.

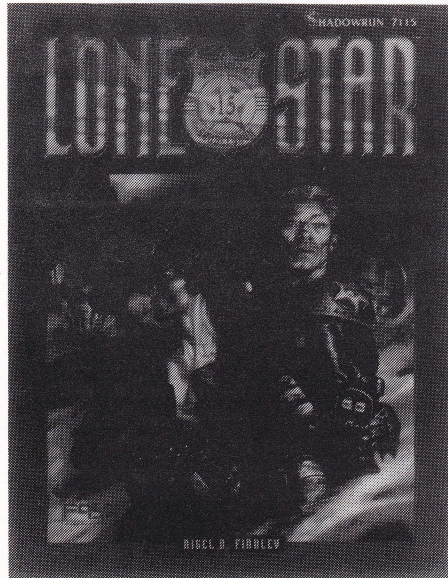
I may not want to role-play anything other than **Castle Falkenstein** for a long time to come.

LONE STAR

Shadowrun Sourcebook

by FASA Corporation

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler



So finally, after years of waiting FASA has provided a sourcebook for the most common bane of Shadowrunners; the Lone Star Securities Corp. I'm sure that in many campaigns, especially those played by combat oriented 'Runners, Lone Star is one of the main adversaries. If that is so in your gamre, then this 136 page sourcebook details everything you ever needed to know about the security corporation, from its humble beginnings to its present day grip on the law enforcement industry in 2054.

The book is well presented with eight pages of colour artwork and the usual copious amounts of black & white illustrations, all of a good standard. This works well with the traditional but not yet tired format of Shadowrun sourcebooks, which of course comes complete with glorious amounts of the much-renowned, and entertaining, Shadowtalk.

The Lone Star sourcebook covers a series of topics from the organisation's corporate structure to looking at its many specialised divisions such as; Tactical, Patrol, Investigation, Paranormal, Matrix Security, Drugs, Penology and Research & Development. In all, no less than twelve divisions and twenty three departments.

It also covers relations between Lone Star and the local police, internal corruption, correct operational procedures and more. With sections detailing new pieces of equipment, matrix ware and

weaponry there is something here for everyone.

>>>>>[But as mentioned above the book shines in its shadow talk where it truly gives the hooks and ammunition a referee needs to use such a product.

Here the book gives the true vibe on what other runners have been up against or been able to get away with. Such topics as how to bribe a Lone Star officer, how their internal investigations are conducted or how to get hold of their latest high tech gear can be invaluable.]<<<<<

-Tree Napper (14:03:07/09-AUG-94)

With such a wealth of information presented within this book, the question of whether it is of use to you and your game depends solely on the type of game you play. If you are playing in a serious campaign, or perhaps just a short scenario that is going to involve the Star, you should seriously consider the purchase.

For a good game that can only be improved with the depth that this and other books like it give it, this is worth at least a very serious look. But if your adventures regularly take you to the streets of Seattle (or as Mr Taber tells me, the Australian city-state of the Sydney Orbital) this is a worthwhile purchase.

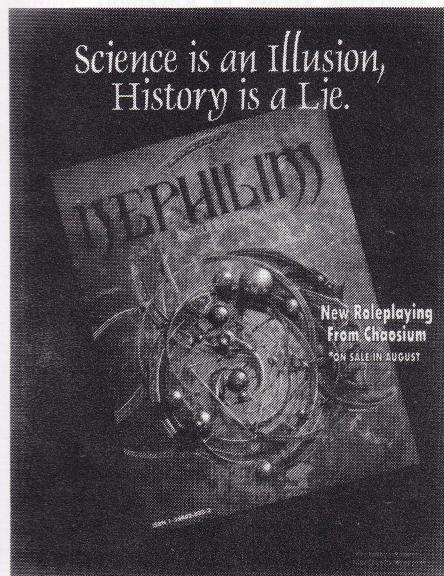
One that will come in very handy for referees and runners alike.

NEPHILIM

Occult Role-Playing Game

by Chaosium Inc

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels



Strange unexplained phenomena, secret societies, dark conspiracies; these nefarious activities are all too real in **Nephilim**. In this new game of occult roleplaying you get to play one of the Nephilim, an ancient race of spirits who lie buried in Stasis, awaiting a reawakening wherein they invade the nearest Human, thereby creating a Simulcrum, and inhabiting it until the unfortunate vehicle runs out of warranty and dies. Once this awakening occurs, your sleeping Nephilim character is thrust into a world much changed since your last incarnation. The great role-playing challenge of **Nephilim** is to play this multi-layered persona (you gain some of the knowledge and skills of your host) whilst trying to come to terms with your radically changed environment all the while seeking magic knowledge and your ultimate goal - the transcendent state of Agartha.

In **Nephilim** a lot of time and effort is put into character creation; your Nephilim persona has been around since prehistoric times (Atlantis), and you're presumed to have lived many lives and gained many skills and learnings from formative periods in real-world history. A neat touch is the device called Chinese Portrait: players must answer questions about their character such as "If I were a colour I would be..." building a more imaginative abstract of the character than the traditional list of statistics that fill most games' character sheets. In fact, Chaosium have kept game mechanics down

to an elegant minimum. The basic mechanic is the tried and true percentile system, with all actions carried out by checking a dice roll against a skill score and adding in any difficulty modifiers deemed applicable to the situation by the referee. Simple and effective. Progress up the ladder to Agartha is measured by skill level advancement.

Magic really plays a big part in the game; Nephilim are linked to the three spheres of magic - sorcery, alchemy and summoning. Although the number of actual spells defined by the game system is small (probably to be expanded by a supplement), they are sufficiently unusual in tone and effect to make them a welcome addition to the genre. Have a look at "The Riders Armed from Head to Feet from the River of Dreams!"

Nephilim has a lot going for it. Rules are left backstage whilst rich character development and game atmosphere are clearly in the spotlight. While the idea of ancient magical spirits wandering your local city in search of enlightenment is an excellent roleplaying opportunity, I just wonder if there are enough clearly defined objectives to maintain a campaign? And then there's the violence - the introductory scenario has a companion gunned down by an Uzi-wielding shopkeeper. I just wonder if the disclaimer "For Mature Readers" is really where roleplaying should be heading?

A superbly evocative game and a worthy opponent to the many others in this genre.

PANTHEONS

Rifts Supplement

by Palladium Books Inc

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Pantheons is *not* a rerun of all those vaguely remembered mythologies common to so many game books on gods. Although staying with the traditional half dozen divine collectives, in this book each pantheon has been given the trademark Rift's treatment lifting them from the mundane to the magnificent. The author, Carella, has designed these gods to fit snugly into the Rifts megaverse, and made them playable and relevant. Omnipotence is replaced by the concept of each god being an alien intelligence with an active interest in the campaign world.

Each god is detailed with charm and wit, drawing on traditional myths but adding a large dose of originality. Check out Hermes on his bike, armed with the Herminator Pistol, or Mummu the Babylonian god of craft in his guise as a techno-wizard. Each god has a distinct temperament to guide the referee rather than a set of strictures etched in stone. The black and white illustrations maintain the flavour of fevered creativity.

In short, Palladium have once again come up with an industry rarity, a package which shows imagination. A-Team approved!

MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM

Planescape Appendix by TSR, Inc

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

It is true to say that this book is largely a rehash of Monstrous Compendium 8, but it is worthy of note for several reasons. The format is changed (bound softback rather than loose leaf), and the artwork vastly improved - another DiTerlizzi extravaganza. And the text has been significantly updated to tie all these extra-planar creatures in with the excellent new *Planescape* setting (if you're an AD&D game fan and you've not begun playing this campaign yet, you must have missed my rave in issue 18!).

For those who don't have MC8 this book is a great buy regardless of your interest in *Planescape*, the list of creatures herein represent the ultimate scary monsters for AD&D; Baatezu (the devils that went missing from 2nd Edition), Tanar'ri (ye olde demons renamed), the brilliant Githyanki and Githzerai plus the truly weird Modrons (I reckon these polyhedral critters were inspired by someone's dice bag!). The new PC race, Tiefling is also presented.

This is another good, solid *Planescape* product with many appetising tidbits of planar information to add flavour to your AD&D gaming. Very tasty.

LISTEN UP, YOU PRIMITIVE SCREWHEADS!!!

The Unexpurgated Cyberpunk

Referee's Guide - R. Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

After listing the title, Nick hasn't left me much room to review this little gem. The worst thing about this title is that it is likely to be overlooked by anyone who doesn't play Cyberpunk. That would be a big mistake. This product belongs on every referee's bookshelf, regardless of the genre they are running. Basically, **TUCRG** is chock full of invaluable roleplaying tips and advice that is applicable to all games.

Presented as a series of "How To" essays written by experienced Cyberpunk referees and game designers (Mike Pondsmith included), the topics covered include Long-Term Campaigns, Style and Atmosphere, GM Control & Problem Players, Cyberpunk Sociology, Character Development, Dirty Tricks, New Rules. Any referee not needing help in any of these areas in their games?

A chatty tone is maintained throughout with a great idea springing from almost every paragraph. Essential for Cyberpunks, but really should be on the reading list of every roleplayer.

Bravo R.Talsorian!

THE RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR

FR Campaign Boxed Set - TSR, Inc
Reviewed by Adam Whitt

This boxed set represents quite good value for Forgotten Realms devotees - a 128 page campaign guide, 32 page of adventure book, 8 adventure hook cards, 8 Monstrous Compendium pages and four enormous colour maps of the city ruins. But after seeing what TSR are capable of with Planescape it really pales in comparison. Here the presentation is a bit dry, the artwork lacking inspiration, and the standard AD&D high-fantasy feel sometimes grates; take, for example, the ever-so-nice Temple to Lathander providing a convenient refuge for player characters within the otherwise hellish ruins.

Written by Ed Greenwood, and filled with novel and interesting ideas, this boxed set would take quite a long time, and some good fun sessions to run through. It needs a fair amount of referee input before play can commence, but that usually does come with the territory, and with the number of 'doors' leading out of Myth Drannor it would make an excellent launch pad for a Planescape campaign. If you want to hang around and become the most powerful dudes in Faerun, that is OK, too. Reasonable value.

SPRAWL MAPS

Shadowrun Accessory
by FASA Corporation
Reviewed by Adam Whitt

If you are anything like me, you're a sucker for well drawn maps. **Sprawl Maps** is a neat accessory to Shadowrun that harks back to that golden era when every game publisher was bringing out colour floor plans printed on semi-sturdy cardboard. And good on them, I say, a referee can never get his or her hands on enough of these colourful play aids.

There are seven maps presented in this set depicting a series of typical near future suburban settings; a nightclub, apartments, park, subway/monorail station, subway/monorail cars, and two storeys of a warehouse. All maps fold-out to A3 size (the night club consists of two cards with a slight overlapped join) and are full-colour top-down views of the locales, imprinted with an unobtrusive grid of asterisks 1 inch apart to denote ground scale ideal for 25mm figures. I can see plenty of uses for all of the locales, although three monorail carriages is too many, perhaps the engine car could have been included.

Useful for all modern and near future games for when you want to show the players where they are getting 'fragged'.

RAVENLOFT

2nd Ed AD&D Campaign Setting
by TSR
Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

Everyone knows of Ravenloft, gothic horror, the supernatural and AD&D's first successful attempt to generate a game atmosphere. Since the original module the product has become its own boxed campaign setting, with recently a second edition being released. Is the latest edition good? Was a second edition necessary? And what's inside?

The first answer is an unfortunate negative. By the standards of other AD&D products perhaps it is good, but compare it to what the rest of the gaming industry can now offer and you'll see that TSR has just used an opportunity to resell a product to its customers.

This brings me to the second question. TSR has come up with a pathetic and unoriginal reason (something that reminds me of a storyline from the old D&D cartoon show) for the demi-plane to be reshaped. Such an event, the Conjunction apparently justifies us spending our money.

What's inside, very little that you didn't get the first time. Don't waste your time with this, go for Dark Sun or Planescape.

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The Abbey

A tale of horror and adventure set in Unae, by Andrew Daniels & Adam Whitt

OPENING REMARKS

Our latest Readers Poll showed that although few of you use the adventures we publish exactly as they are presented, the great majority of you want us to continue printing scenarios. The most common comment is that you like to plunder the scenarios printed in Australian Realms for ideas. That's great, we want you to use Realms as a source book for your own campaigns.

Anyway, in light of this we've decided against giving game-specific statistics in our most of our scenarios. Instead, we will focus on presenting an interesting setting, evocative atmosphere, intelligent themes, and exciting adventure hooks which you can customise for use in *your* favourite game.

SYSTEM AND LEVEL

The Abbey will run successfully with any of the following systems: **AD&D** (Ravenloft setting), **Call of Cthulhu** (By Gaslight), **Palladium FRP**, **Runequest**, and **Warhammer FRP**. We recommend you keep player numbers down to 3 or 4 and low level/power as it is easier to keep the atmosphere of horror with a small number of characters who all fear for their lives.

SETTING, TONE AND THEME

The Abbey is set in the Australian Realms campaign world of Unae, specifically in a remote location in the Delbinola Forest north of the city of St. Silva, within the Heletian League's Greater Baimiopia. While in Ossard and the capital historic events are unfolding, the people of St. Silva are largely unaware of the impending war with the elves; yet perhaps an even more frightening event is about to unfold in their corner of Unae.

The tone of this adventure should be one of slowly revealed horror as the players gradually discover that Loren Abbey is not what it seems, that the Sisterhood of Emile have been subverted by an evil power in Delbinola, and that if they do not take action to intervene, the blood-drenched aspect of the Horned God, Bamorrah the Feral will be unleashed.

There are many tangled themes in this adventure; blighted love, revenge and the terrible aspect of nature revealed red in tooth and claw.

FORMAT

The scenario is presented in the form of a short story followed by a plotline synopsis to guide referees who want to expand out the adventure, and finally we've provided a map of the Loren Abbey with some of the more interesting areas described. We suggest referees aim to recreate the events of the story and to flesh out their version of the adventure by adding encounters of their own design.

THE ABBESS'S TALE

"How much longer?"

The aging Abbess ran a long fingernail down the windowpane causing the young Sister to flinch with the noise. "Soon, my pretty, soon," she cackled.

"Then how many?"

"Four, perhaps five."

The Sister turned to leave. "I shall prepare."

The Abbess continued to stare out of the barred window, seemingly not hearing. "Soon," she chuckled to herself. "Very, very soon."



They were free lances, mercenaries, and Eggario Zafretta had hired them to guard his daughter, Angelica, along the road to Loren Abbey. But there was a fly in the ointment. Zafretta had insisted on sending along a guide, but no ordinary guide, an orc who knew the hinterlands of Baimiopia but not the manners of civilised society, or at least so the small company thought.

"Kreinta curse him!" Niccolo threw down his pack which promptly burst open spilling its contents around their camp site. "If he goads me again, I'll wipe that grin from his face, permanently."

Casellan patted Niccolo on the back. "Don't worry, another week'll see us through this. Zafretta pays well enough."

Battini shook his head in agreement. "Best keep an eye on him, though."

At that moment a dark figure stalked into the light of the camp fire; Titus their guide.

"Milady requires your presence," Titus announced. Even the sound of his voice, struggling to mouth Heletian, filled the others with revulsion.

Casellan nodded, "Best not keep her majesty waiting." The guide nodded and slunk away followed by the muscular figure of Casellan.



"I will tell you a tale!" The old Abbess leaned forward almost knocking her wooden bowl over, her milky eyes fixed on the little group gathered at the refectory table. Casellan leaned back, surprised. It was the first time since they arrived that he'd seen her so animated.

"A tale of blighted love and unending hatred." Her face straightened as she regained control.

"Once their was a knight of Des Sankta Glavos. Alphonse was tall and strong, and he rode the lands of Greater Baimiopia fighting wickedness. None he came against could withstand his mighty arm for St. Baimio smiled upon his soul. Then one day a great evil befell him. A strange creeping malaise that

sapped his spirit. He sought relief at the house of a woman renowned for her healing skills, and eventually she brought him back to health. For her care she asked nothing though the hero promised her much. She had fallen in love with the knight.

"After a time he left her house, saying he had much to do in the world, but he promised that one day he would return for her. So she waited, though each day of his absence burned in her soul like a consuming fire. Travellers were few in those days with the ogres still a threat, but from each visitor to her house she sought news of her brave knight.

"Then one day she received news, though it was not what she had looked for. You see, low-born Alphonse was to be married to a noblewoman, daughter to the House Zafretta. And so the healer left her own house and retired to a remote Abbey that opened its doors to all those who sought piety and comfort. This is that place."

Battini smiled at the Abbess. "That is indeed a sad tale, but..."

"Sad?" suddenly the Abbess' voice was like crackling ice. "No it is not sad, for it is not over. Hear me out. You see, the knight did return, for the malaise was not gone, only hampered for a space, and he came seeking the only one he knew who could heal him."

The walls of the Refectory hung heavy with silence as the Abbess looked into the flickering fire, the red light playing across her craggy face.

"And he was once again aided, Sister?" Niccolo asked.

The old woman rose to leave. She nodded. "He was indeed aided, my son, he was indeed."



"The old lady really gives me the creeps," Niccolo drew the woollen blanket tightly to his neck.

"Certainly has a way of getting your attention," agreed Casellan.

"She never finished, either."

Casellan unlaced his jerkin and rolled wearily into the narrow bed. "Finished what?"

"The story. What became of the knight? And is there a connection to Angelica. She did say 'House Zafretta'!"

Casellan shrugged, too tired to know or care. "Tonight we sleep in comfort, tomorrow we return to St. Silva, get paid, and enjoy our reward."

Battini grunted from his bunk. "Do you think it was her?"

"Who?"

"Her! The Abbess, is she the girl in the story?"

"How should I know? Let's go to sleep."

The room fell quiet.

"Cas?" Niccolo whispered.

Silence.

"You awake?"

A muffled grunt.

"Do you think we should leave Angelica here?"

"Not our problem."

"This place is a bit strange though. Do you think her father knew what it was like when he sent her here?"

"For the last time, shut up and get some sleep."

Silence.

The scream cut through the thin night air.

Battini sat bolt upright. "What was that?"

Casellan drew a long dagger from beneath his pillow and moved quickly to the shuttered window, the moonlight etching the lean curves of his upper body. "Door," he hissed sharply.

Niccolo rolled quickly across the floor and snatched up his sword. He moved to the door.

Casellan drew back the shutter. "Hell's Breath! What is it?" His companions moved quickly to the window and peered out.

Across the moonlit rooftop opposite the dormitory, a silhouetted figure hurried. It's hunched back arched under the weight of a struggling sack. As they watched it paused and turned toward them, from its malformed face curved two huge, wicked fangs. It's body was covered by a tangled mass of heavy fur tufting over supple muscles. The beast growled, then ducked down below the roofline and out of sight.

"It's heading for the woods. We'd better raise the alarm."

Niccolo nodded.

"Battini, you wait here, watch our stuff."

Battini looked pale. "But..."

The pair moved to the door, leaving Battini alone. "We shan't be long."

Battini's eyes nervously traced the rooftops of the Abbey's clustered buildings to where they met the outer wall. The others had been away for some time, but except for a few muffled cries earlier all had remained quiet. Certainly no hue and cry. He returned his attention to the roofline. The beast had been moving toward that stone tower, only changing direction when it noticed the watchers. The thought slowly dawned on him. The creature had not been stealing out to the woods with its prey, but moving deeper into the abbey. Battini turned, caught with indecision, then gripping his knife tightly he left the safety of the room.

Battini walked swiftly down the short corridor, guided by the full moonlight flooding in from the high window at the end. He checked Titus' room, empty. Next he walked down the stairs to the courtyard. Moonlight trapped by shadows of the surrounding buildings formed a quiet pool of soft light in the centre of the courtyard, spotlighting the weed-choked fountain. Strange, wasn't the abbey supposed to be famed for its fountain?

He moved past the fountain to the far building; with no obvious entrance he scanned upward. The wall was high, but made of quarried stone and weathered rough with age; not a challenge to somebody with his second storey skills - the climbs in St. Silva were much tougher.

On the steep, slated roof Battini clambered carefully to the apex, then set off in the direction the beast had been travelling. Where the hall met the tower there was a vine growing, up the tower wall, twisted and sturdy. He shinnied up it. Far below the

deep well of light in the courtyard showed empty.

Atop the tower he paused for breath next an old brick chimney. A broken entrance was in plain view in the moonlight. With a thundering heart Battini went inside.

A narrow ladder of protruding bricks lined the inside of the chimney. Hugging the wall he edged carefully downward. He felt his stomach knot; below, an open fireplace framed a small flickering light. Slobbering groans interspersed with the sharp cracking of bones and gristle crunched between powerful jaws, rose from the chamber beyond.

Battini froze, a sick sensation sweeping his spine. Yet fascination drew him onward. He slunk carefully on all fours to the entrance and peered into the room.

Battini's heart froze at what he saw. Crouched atop a huge blood-blackened table the beast slobbered over its quivering meal. Entrails and offal lay scooped in piles around the ripped torso as the creature reached his shaggy head, spattered with blood, into the open chest cavity and ate. The blood of the unfortunate victim pooled over the tabletop and drained through a hole into a wooden bucket seemingly placed for that very purpose beneath the table. Battini dragged his eyes from the back of the beast to look at the head of the corpse. The rolled up eyes of the victim stared blindly at him. They were the eyes of Titus!

"I'm telling you, Holy Sister, there is a wild beast of the Horned God running amok in the abbey!" Casellan was almost screaming with frustration. The calm Abbess looked up at him and shook her withered head.

"There is no beast. You are fatigued, the moon in the forest. Shadows playing tricks."

Casellan threw up his arms in exasperation. "I will not argue with you, Sister, but something is prowling the grounds and I mean to find it!"

"You will not trespass where you are not wanted. Please, return to your rooms and rest. I assure you, we are all safe here."

Casellan shrugged resignedly. After all, was it their problem? He was hired to see Angelica here safely and so she was. He nodded at Niccolo. "There's nothing that can be done here." And they left the Abbess to return to their room.

Battini stared into the darkness and tried to rise. His head hit something unforgiving, forcing him to lay back down. Darkness. Everywhere. Total darkness. He stretched out his arms, only to find them also constrained by lack of space. He felt the panic rising and forced himself to close his eyes and slow his breathing. He tried to wriggle on this back, first toward his head, then to his feet. Again he was



blocked. Boxed in. He tried to think where he could be. There was something familiar about his prison. His elbows ran down the sides. Felt the kink. He felt a scream welling up from deep within in him. Dear Kreinta, he was imprisoned within a coffin!

The crone stumbled slightly as she began the long descent. She was tired. Time reached out its taloned claw to rob her of what little vitality remained. It mattered not. Soon he would return and bring the new life she craved, for surely he needed her as much as she had hopes for him.

She rested now. Eyes still keen, noted that all was as in readiness. Across the still glowing iron altar, her knight lay stretched. Above him the girl hung suspended, ready. Around, the assembled Sisters waited quietly.

"Is it time?"

The Abbess nodded. "It is time."

As she approached the altar, the assembled coven murmured a slow chant, quietly, almost imperceptibly. Their Abbess, old beyond her body's apparent years, stood at the altar head and began to speak. Words, sounds, strange twisted utterances that were not Heletian escaped her thin-lipped mouth. The bound girl twitched. From beneath the heavy folds of her habit, the Abbess drew a slim blade, forged of black iron.

Angelica's eyes startled open. Suspended above the altar, she began to struggle, her eyes bulging above her gagged mouth.

Slowly, effortlessly now, the wizened old woman in Kreinta's robes, soiled and corrupted by arcane symbols daubed in dried blood, moved to the dangling sacrifice. The girl saw her, saw her fate, and seemed suddenly unable to struggle any more. The knife blade, although ancient and rusted, had a very keen blade. As the Abbess drew it slowly across Angelica's delicate neck, a thin red line seeped a wide grin. The assembly gasped in ecstasy, their chanting increasing in volume and vibrancy, a sense of raw power thrilling through their blood.

The first droplets of blood ran down the girl's body and dripped from her feet onto the recumbent male figure lying on the altar. He stirred, turning his head to avoid the warm, moist drop. His stomach churned. Water! How long had it been since his last drink? Every muscle tightened. Another drop, this time he allowed it to caress his parched lips. He tried to fight the growing thirst. He opened his mouth and spoke the litany. More drops fell, a flow that filled his frothing mouth.

"Baimio's Law..."

A stream of blood bathed his head.

"...shall keep us..."

It splashed in his opening eyes and splattered against his beating forehead.

"...and protect us..."

Now the blood ran over him and onto the altar. He arched his back as the patterned iron raised in temperature to sear his flesh. His blood-slick head seemed to swell with the ever increasing volume of the Sister's chanting. His tortured soul cried out to his Lord that had forsaken him. "Kreinta!"

But no answer came, and he surrendered his mouth to the bloody rain. He swallowed deeply. His body writhed with long-awaited rapture.

The Abbess watched as her handiwork finally came to fruition. Her eyes moistened with tears. Her beloved knight was coming home. She opened her arms to welcome him. His eyes, red with Angelica's offering looked at her with poignant longing. Then they glazed over. What was this? She hesitated a moment then leant down to kiss her paramour.

He luxuriated in the new Life. He felt complete. Then icy cold. His enraptured body writhed no more; He was filled with a terrible stillness. Flexing His arms He broke the bonds that held Him. A strangely familiar face leaned over Him. Perhaps it was this old crone that had helped Him enter here. To express His gratitude He reached up and with one fluid movement wove His hands around her neck, pulled her toward Him for a bloody, bubbly kiss, snapped her spine and drained her soul unto His.

Then He sat up to view His mortal audience. They stood in horrified silence as He opened His mouth to speak. The words came, but in a tongue they did not, could not understand. Noting their confusion, He searched His memory for the words of their chanting, then recognising the language He spoke again, slowly, deliberately.

"I am Bamorrah. The Horned One. Blood has called me. I will drink some more."



PLOT OUTLINE

1. Hiring On In St. Silva: Zafretta, a noble of St. Silva hires the PCs as mercenary guards to safely escort his daughter Angelica to the Abbey of Loren where she is to be inducted into the Sisterhood of Emile. By doing this Zafretta hopes to gain favour with Kreinta and the Church. To help them find their way, Zafretta also hires a woodsmen of some standing, but doubtful origins - the orc guide, Titus.

2. The Journey To Loren: Titus leads the party a merry dance through the paths of the Delbinola Forest, deliberately confusing the party so that they cannot readily find their way back without him. The players will have difficulty liking Titus as he refuses to share information, and treats them as junior partners in the mission.

The referee should create several medium threat encounters for the journey, so that when the party arrive at the abbey they feel their job is done. As they near the abbey the forest creatures seem to be unnaturally hostile.

3. Arrive At The Abbey: Angelica is safely delivered to Loren Abbey. The party are invited to take refreshment and a night's rest before returning to St. Silva. Players will notice the abbey lacks the calm, ordered piety of a place of Kreinta worship.

4. A Night Of Horrors: The Beast of the Abbey awakens the party. The PCs then set about exploring the abbey. This is where the main part of the adventure begins. Allow the players to roam the grounds and buildings searching for the beast, slowly uncovering the abbey's horrible secrets.

5. The Ceremony: the climax of the adventure comes as the characters discover the kultist's chapel beneath the church. There they witness, and attempt to avert, the summoning of Bamorrah.

6. Angelica Returned Home: if all goes well, the players should then take Angelica back to her father, Eggario Zafretta, in St. Silva, and report the Abbess' activities to the Church of Baimiopia.

LOREN ABBEY

The Loren Abbey, in the Darmaro Mountain foothills, deep within the Delbinola Forests north of St. Silva, was founded over three hundred years ago by the Order of St. Emile (see *Church of Baimiopia* issue 12) to take advantage of the healing properties of mineral water springs in the area. For many years Loren provided succour and healing to those in need, and many nobles sent their daughters to study the devout ways of St. Emile within the quiet sanctuary of the abbey's walls. A church to St. Emile was erected, an infirmary built, and in time, an orphanage. The need for all these services was greatest in the time of the Ogre Wars, but in time this need dwindled. Now, although the ogre conflicts are far from over, at least there is not a state of outright war in the region, and the Loren Abbey's services are no longer in great demand.

Even so, even unto recent times, Loren Abbey had a good reputation; then Abbess Mara came into her rule. For the past thirty years she has ruled the abbey, and in that time, her cankerous heart has led her to seek powers within the forest that should have been left undisturbed. Mara has embraced the power of Bamorrah the Feral, an ancient natural aspect of the Horned God, a bloody and potent incarnation of nature twisted by evil. From him, Mara has sought the power to return life to her love, Alphonse the dead Sankta Glavos.

To aid her in her quest, Mara has perverted the sisterhood and the abbey into kultish ways. Now the forest is reclaiming the abbey grounds, and Bamorrah has claimed its soul.

THE GATEHOUSE

The tortuous forest road leads over hilly country into a wide valley. Ahead can be seen the dome of St Emile's church over the walls of Loren Abbey. As Angelica's entourage approach the gatehouse, a bell tolls slowly within the abbey. Where once there was cleared grounds around the abbey walls, now briars, thorny shrubs and vines have encroached, and in places are eating away at the masonry of the very walls. The sisterhood must have dwindled to allow this to happen.

Along the outer walls large, pale-skinned cats lounge languidly, their pink eyes staring at the party with an almost intelligent, hungry interest.

The cats have roamed into the abbey grounds from the forest and feed well on the growing rat population (see the Orphanage). These feral cats are infected with Bamorrah's evil, and can pose a fierce danger if they catch an adventurer alone; then they will attack in large numbers, using co-operative tactics to overwhelm their victim.

As the party approach the gatehouse, four novitiates of the abbey manhandle the heavy wrought iron gates open. They welcome the party, and invite them inside. Although she has maintained a haughty distance from the soldiers of fortune who have escorted her this far, Angelica will now call on them to take pity on her and return her home. Angelica is most reluctant to enter the grim, prison-like walls of the abbey.

THE REFECTORY

Invited to cleanse and refresh themselves after their arduous journey through the Delbinola Forest, the escort party are then given a wholesome meal in the Refectory. The Sisters will be inconspicuous, only the novitiates from the Gatehouse attending to their needs. Abbess Mara will attend the meal. Angelica is not present; Mara explains "She is being prepared for her new life. You may assure her father, she is in good hands now".

During the meal, Abbess Mara will relate the story of the Knight Des Sankta Glavos. She is fevered with excitement at the prospect of tonight's ceremony, and will make a firm impression of madness in the minds of her listeners.

Refereeing Tip: Turn down the lights, adopt your most sinister look, use a croaking voice and tell the story. Ham it up.

THE DORMITORY

The player characters are led to small, austere but comfortable rooms. Titus insists on rooming alone. Encourage your players to discuss the peculiar behaviour of the Abbess before settling down to a sleep.

Refereeing Tip: With the lights dimmed, it is time to hush the noise. Tell your players they are about to have a potent dream in this special holy place and ask them to write notes detailing what they would most desire in the world - no consulting, no chatter. Get up from the table as if to look over their shoulders. When your players are completely quiet scream your most blood curdling scream.

THE NIGHT OF HORRORS

The players are awakened by a scream; bestial snarling, and muffled bangs emanate from the next room. If they rush to investigate, they discover Titus' room in turmoil. Through the open window they see a malformed shape stealing across the distant roofline, a struggling human form slung over its back.

Refereeing Tip: the player characters should want to investigate from here, if not to rescue Titus, then to at least allay their growing concerns about the abbey before leaving Angelica here. They will not find Abbess Mara, or any of the Sisterhood (they are below ground in the kult chapel).

THE SACRISTY

A small change room in which the sacred vestments and chattels of St. Emile's Order are kept. There are four chairs and a small wooden table. On one wall, a large wardrobe opens to reveal four altar frocks (dusty and moth-eaten) and a small locked chest. Within the chest are two gilt candlesticks, a silver offering bowl, and a large Book of Praise - anyone reading the book who is skilled in Religious Lore will notice that the book has been radically altered to remove all references to St. Emile.

There is a large full length mirror on the fourth wall, presumably to assist in proper robing. The mirror is actually hinged to the wall (a Search or similar skill is required to notice this) and conceals an opening to a small room.

THE TAINTED SANCTUM

Inside this room is a wooden armour stand with the plate armour of a Des Sanka Glavos knight hung on it. Also slung over the stand is a belt and scabbard containing a greatsword of superior craftsmanship. The armour is crisscrossed with strange marks, blue-silver trails of dried mucus. Both armour and sword bear the peculiar hue and mark of Turaso Rose Steel (see *Greater Baimiopia* in issue 13) and grant the wielder a combat advantage due to their superb fit (the armour), perfect balance and honed edge (+10%/+2 bonus to defence and attack depending on the mechanics of your game system). Anyone wearing the armour or using the sword openly, however, will attract attention to themselves, and if their authority to do so is questioned, they'd better have a good story ready as the Church, and the Order of Des Sanka Glavos do not take kindly to impostors - heretics!

Corpse Slugs: The dried mucus on the armour is the egg-laced the by-product of corpse slugs. These small worms inhabit graves and feed on flesh that has decayed to the consistency of soup; they are unable to harm living flesh. Their immature form, however, is very dangerous to living persons, and the bane of sextons and grave robbers. The corpse slug female lays her eggs in the thin mucus trails she leaves behind her. These microscopic eggs may lay dormant for many years until incubated by the warmth of a living body. When they hatch, the tiny grubs work toward the source of the warmth until in contact with the host's skin. The larvae will then bury themselves under the skin raising an irritating red welt, much like ringworm. This will itch furiously (-5%/-1 penalty to all actions that require any concentration). After 24 hours the larvae will then enter the bloodstream of the host, find an internal organ and attach itself where it will begin feeding. Unless the host is healed in some way, they will suffer a swift and debilitating illness with painful symptoms - headaches, fever, dizziness, vomiting and finally coma - before dying within four days. The chemicals released by the host's death trigger the slugs to complete their own life cycle and in mature form they will devour the rotting corpse.

THE SACELLUM

The far end of the sacellum harbours a marble altar stone; before it a kneeling stool. The altar is daubed with horrid symbols of the kult in dried blood. Atop the altar is a blackened bowl and on the wall beyond, an oval mirror. The bowl contains a thick, glutinous syrup of black and red. When the players enter the chapel, one of the sisters will be standing before the altar, seemingly talking to the mirror. Noticing the intrusion she will spin about, look flustered, then quickly usher the characters from the chamber, claiming it is taboo for males to enter the Chapel. She will try to have them return to their room - "Your friend will return by morning."

Mage Mirror: Sister Judita was summoning the others to the ceremony in the chapel. To activate this cultish device, the operator cuts her palm and allows blood to drip into the bowl which also holds other gory ingredients - vital organs from small forest animals. As the caller's blood drips into the bowl, she incants one of the ceremonies of Bamorrah and is then able to speak across the void to deliver a spoken message to those previously linked to the caller by blood (another ceremony of the kult). The blood point loss necessary depends on the distance to be crossed; 1 point of blood (hit point in most games) per mile.

FOUNTAIN OF ST. EMILE

In the centre of the courtyard, before the magnificent church building, stands a marble fountain. It is simple in style, consisting of a shallow-walled pool surrounding a wide-brimmed, white stone bowl atop a tapering pedestal. Both pool and bowl are now choked with decayed leaf litter and sprouting weeds. This fountain was once the main source of Loren Abbey's healing powers. The waters in the springs beneath abbey will still bubble up if the bowl is cleared and the conduit in the pedestal unclogged.

Healing Waters: of themselves, the spring waters that trickle from the Darmaro Mountains have little more than the refreshing tang of clean mineral water. Combined with one of the appropriate ceremonies of the Sisterhood of St. Emile, however, the waters take on miraculous powers - able to heal wounds, remove sickness, restore sight and improve fertility. Most initiates within the abbey Loren are aware of these ceremonies, but no longer use them.

LIBRARY

Shrouded in dust, the library stands largely neglected. The library has but a few useful tomes - mostly local histories of Greater Baimiopia, St Emile's life and some forest lore. If a player had time to catalogue and study the books he could take an increase in certain knowledge skills - History, Religious Lore, Herbalism, and Healing.

ALMONRY

Once the treasure store of the Church of St. Emile, where goods and money collected by the Sisterhood were kept ready for distribution to the needy, now the store is simply a jumble of junk. There is a desk and ledger in the almonry which records all financial transactions of the abbey up until seven years ago.

Refereeing Tip: If your players will gripe about the lack of such things, here is the place to add some pecuniary treasures, or valuable trade items.

ORPHANAGE

This two-storey building features cold staring windows and a narrow tower at one end. Within, the upper floor dormitories are deep in dust and mould, long emptied of the refugee children of the Ogre Wars. The lower floor was converted to a stables and barn, and is now filthy with soiled straw and infested with rats. These rats are under the evil influence of Bamorrah and quite aggressive. Rat swarms can be called from the orphanage by Abbess Mara if she sacrifices some of her own blood (2 points) and speaks the correct ceremony.

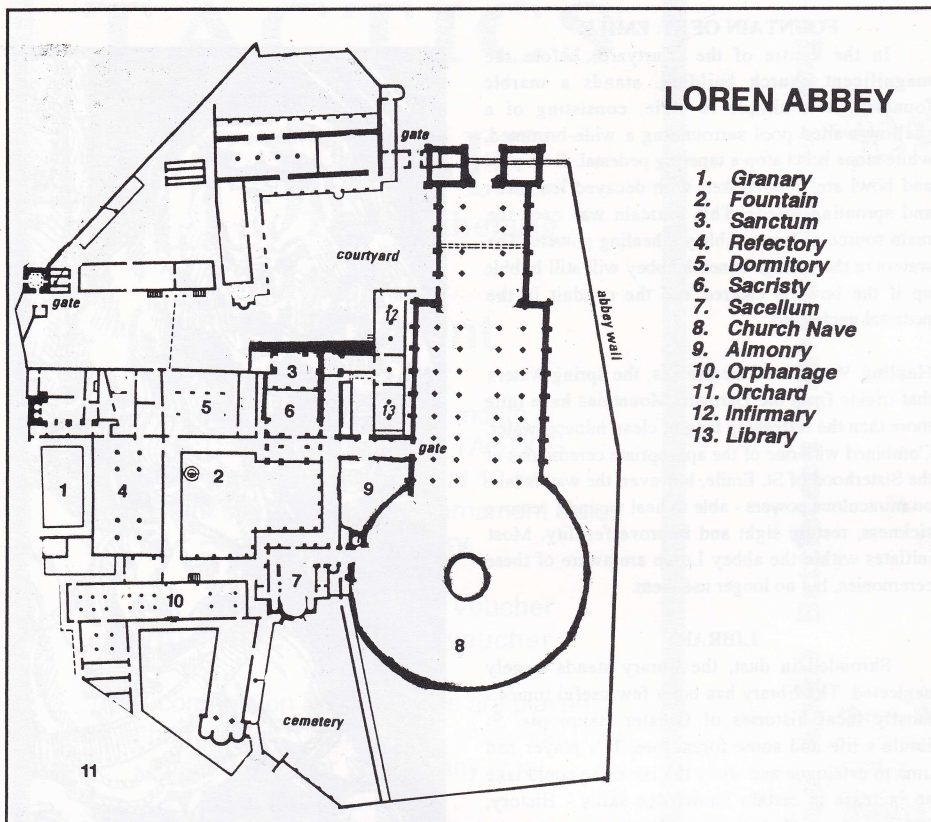
The abutting tower has four floors; they were once rooms for the sisters who ran the orphanage. Now their only occupant Vorputro - half man, half beast, he must feed on living flesh to survive. Vorputro was once a labourer here, but was attacked by the feral cats roaming the abbey and inflicted with a terrible disease of Bamorrah. When the moon is full, his appetite becomes uncontrollable - then it is that he hunts. Titus' remains are here.

Refereeing Tip: Vorputro is a very dangerous foe, preternaturally strong, cunning and possessed of a ferocity born of desperation. Having said all that, there is a shred of humanity left in him. If he can be overpowered without killing him, and healed by the waters of the fountain (remember they need a Sister to achieve this), then Vorputro will become an invaluable ally willing and able to lead the player characters to the kult chapel.



ORCHARD

The orchard, was at one time well-tended, and orderly. Now it is overgrown, the fruit blighted by pests, rusts and moulds and the trees slowly dying. Deeper within the orchard, characters may discover pits dug by Vorputro in saner moments where he guiltily buries the remnants of his meals (in wooden coffins he builds in a Carpenter's Shop next to the Granary). The pits also contain the clothes and equipment of these sorry souls.



THE INFIRMARY

After the neglect of the other abbey buildings, the infirmary is surprisingly neat and tidy. It is as if someone still regularly cleans the otherwise deserted building. At midnight, eerie sounds of suffering and torment reverberate around the whitewashed walls. A pale, ghostly figure carrying a lantern will approach the player characters if they enter the hospice. The haunt was formerly head of the infirmary; a Sister of St. Emile whose uneasy soul cannot rest until Abbess Mara's rule of horror is ended. She will try to warn the characters of the impending ceremony in the vault. Sadly, she cannot speak nor leave the infirmary so her gesturing is likely to merely frighten off the adventurers.

GRANARY

This heavy stone building is locked with bars across the door. Inside, the grain has long rotted, or been eaten by the rats. Locked in the loft are eight Sisters of St. Emile who did not succumb to Bamorrah's evil. They're in a terrible state as only Vorputro seems to remember them, sometimes amusing himself by tossing them a morsel from his latest meal. Remembering when St. Emile was in power at Loren Abbey he dares not touch them.

Refereeing Tip: These are your players best chance of defeating the Abbess. Although half-starved and half-crazed, they know their way around, and can call on St. Emile to aid the party (see The Fountain)

CHURCH NAVE

Under the vast white dome lies the great nave of the Church of St. Emile, all but gutted of all the usual furnishings of the sect. As they enter, the vast emptiness echoes with the character's footsteps. In the centre of the nave a circular altar stone is surrounded by concentric rings of stone pews. Wisps of acrid smelling smoke are filtering up through cracks around the foot of the altar.

Hidden Entrance: If shoved, the altar can be moved quite readily, sliding with a grating sound to reveal a narrow stair cut into the foundations of the church.

LOREN ABBEY

1. Granary
2. Fountain
3. Sanctum
4. Refectory
5. Dormitory
6. Sacristy
7. Sacellum
8. Church Nave
9. Almonry
10. Orphanage
11. Orchard
12. Infirmary
13. Library

THE KULT CHAPEL

Foul smelling, greasy fumes envelop the characters as they descend the stone steps into the vaults beneath the church. The steps lead directly into a chamber beneath the true nave, constructed in a crude parody of the church to house the bloody ceremonies of the Feral Kult of Bamorrah. The chamber is lit with a hazy red light coming from the slow-burning candles of animal fat that surround the room. This place stinks of blood and evil death.

THE CEREMONY

In the centre of the room there is an altar of black iron. Spreadeagled across the altar lies a man; from his once-strong physique, a warrior. His skin is a deathly pale and his eyes black pits, yet a flicker of life endures. His lips are drawn tight across rotted yellow teeth. Above him, Angelica, is suspended by her bound arms, her mouth gagged, her eyes wide

with terror. Around her, dangling from hooks in the ceiling, other slaughtered animals hang, all in various states of decay, blood dripping from the fresher corpses onto the warrior's body, soaking through the parchment dry flesh. Around the altar, the kultists sway to their own, unheard music, softly chanting. As the characters enter the room, Abbess Mara raises a rusted knife to Angelica's throat.

Refereeing Tip: This scene is the Kult Ceremony to call Bamorrah the Feral Blood-God. 'Til now Abbess Mara has been content to sacrifice woodland animals to call on the power of Bamorrah; but ever desperate to raise her beloved Sankta Glavos from the dead (it is he who lies on the altar) she has decided on a human sacrifice.

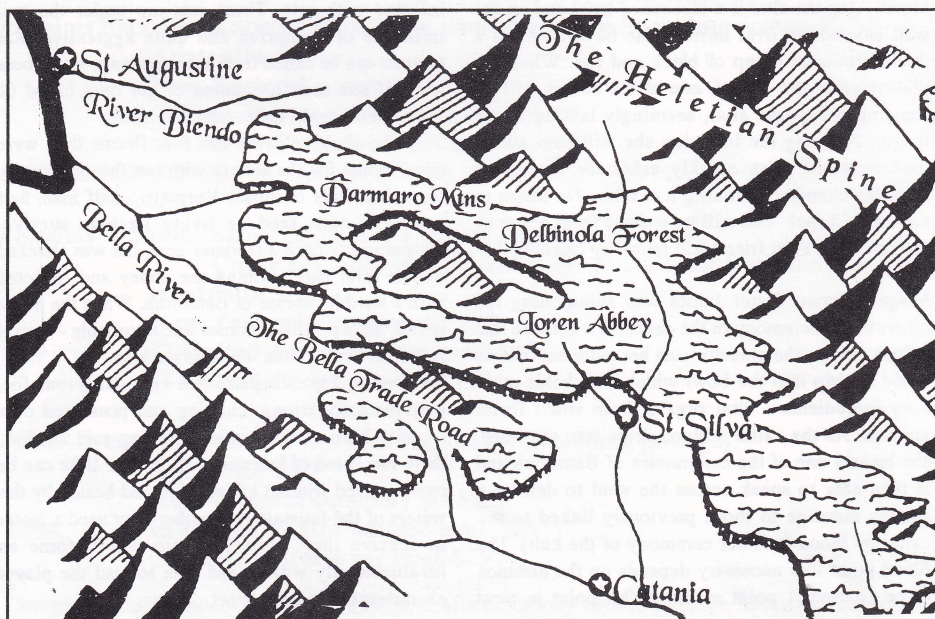
Mara is quite a powerful force, able to call on several feral beasts from the forest to fight her battles if she sacrifices blood. Luckily for the players, she has already spilled much blood this night and is relatively vulnerable. The other kultists (there are about thirty of them) are really non-combatants - untrained in the arts of war and able only to chant minor ceremonies. Still, thirty bodies between them and Mara will pose a problem even for the most aggressive players.

If your players do not intervene now, and Angelica's blood feeds the knight, there is a 5% chance cumulative per drop of her sacrificial blood that the ceremony succeeds, but with catastrophic results. Instead of returning Alphonse to life, Bamorrah will manifest in the Sankta Glavos' body as a *divine incarnation*, the second such to appear in Unae (see *Gargoyle Hives* in issue 17). If this happens everyone in the chapel, the abbey and in your campaign is in serious trouble!

WRAPPING UP THE ADVENTURE

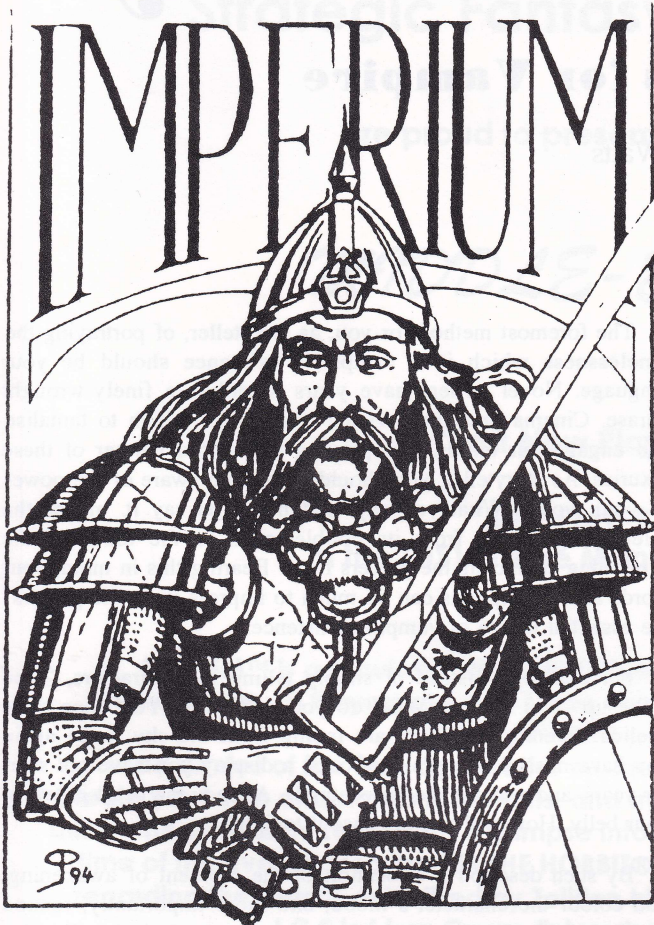
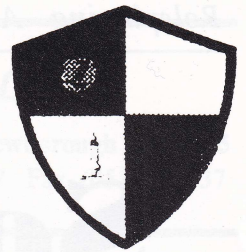
This is all depends on how the players went in the Kult Chapel. If we assume they succeeded in defeating Mara and rescuing Angelica, they should return to St. Silva. This is not too easy, however, as Titus did not lead them here by direct paths. And Bamorrah is still a potent force in the forest, directing forest beasts against the party.

A very satisfactory ending would be if the characters return Angelica safely to her father, and also bring out Alphonse's body and gear to return to the Church of Baimiopia. Their rewards would then be the gratitude of a reasonably powerful noble of St. Silva, and the blessing of the Church. ■





MIDGARD



Midgard Some information to help you live in it

(1) **Have Imagination** : Nobody gets anywhere in this world without it. This is not a war game, though you'd be surprised how difficult it is to get players to do anything else. It is not an economic game, though players still like being immensely rich. This is a **Role-Playing** game. You know... where you act out something else in another world.

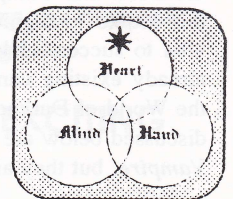
(2) **Talk To People** : Pretty easy really. You enter a city, you see who has been in it recently, and you send them a note to say hi! You talk, swap info, offer them promises you do not intend to keep (its a game after all), and then armed with this better knowledge of the world around you, go out and explore / conquer / raid / buy / sell / invite home to meet mother... or anything else that tickles your fancy. You can hardly get the most out of a **Role-Playing** game if you do not interact.

(3) **Progress** : Sitting around and doing nothing is not at all smart unless you are role-playing a politician, Armed with all the vital information you get out of cities about what you can buy, what you can sell, what skills are taught, what you can borrow out of the local library (I'm serious), and who you can laugh at in jail, it is now possible to go out and change something. Work your way up through the ranks of one of the great families and you have the power of tradition at your finger tips, or maybe try your hand at leading the odd Barbarian horde (I hear berserking is great this time of year), or maybe manipulate the odd city market to your own wishes, or kill the head Ring player and do everyone in the game a favour. The choice is yours.

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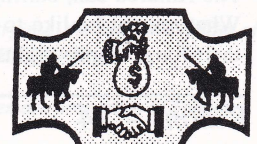
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Sound and Fury

Vital Ingredients for Vampire

by Richard Watts

*"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his weary hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing."*

Macbeth, V, vi

One of the finest role-playing games currently on the market, is without doubt, White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade*. In richness of detail, atmosphere and ease of play, *Vampire* succeeds like no other horror game, save perhaps Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu*, in evoking a sense of dread and nightmare. The twilight eternity of the undead, their tragic existence, and the gothic-punk world these children of the night inhabit are perfectly suited to a style of roleplaying which explores emotions rather than dungeons, and favours drama over dragons. Sadly, it seems that the most important elements of *Vampire* chronicles are all too often overlooked. Even White Wolf appear to have difficulties in publishing appropriate adventure supplements for the game, with the result that *Vampire* is not all it could be. It is the purpose of this article to highlight these ignored ingredients, which are so vital to successful *Vampire* chronicles, in the hope of enriching already existing campaigns, and inspiring others to venture into the World of Darkness. It should not be thought that the elements discussed below are the only factors necessary for good games of *Vampire*, but they are perhaps the most important.

The Curse of Immortality

*" 'I think I'm old and I'm feeling old' you said,
'And its all running out like its the end of the world' you said,
'And its so cold its like the cold if you were dead'
And you smiled for a second."*

The Cure, Plainsong

The essential nature of any *Vampire* chronicle, first and foremost, is the essence of vampires themselves; immortality. The Kindred can, barring accident, exist until the end of the world. What must it be like to be a vampire? How do the Kindred fill in their long, empty nights, century after monotonous century?

The foremost method for you, as storyteller, of portraying the timelessness which is a vampire's existence should be your language. Novel writers have years to polish a finely-wrought phrase. Cinema presents a visual image with which to tantalise and engage our minds. Roleplaying can afford neither of these luxuries. As storyteller, you should always be aware of the power of your words. What you say, and how you say it, makes the roleplaying world, from its cobblestones to the tones of the supporting characters the players meet. Bearing this in mind, your words and descriptions can do much to impress upon the players' the essential nature of vampiric existence.

For example, instead of simply telling the characters, "You wake up. You hunger. What do you do?" try, "You open your eyelids. Evening's colours are fading from the sky; once again you have missed sunset's fireworks, a display you have not seen for years, and will not see for centuries. Already the beast gnaws at your belly. How will you appease it tonight?"

By such descriptive evocation of the moment of awakening, you colour the character's mood, and more importantly, remind them of the endless existence which is a vampire's lot. For the players to truly understand their characters, they must understand and empathise with their character's unlives.

Another way to impress upon players the sheer mass of time weighing upon the Kindred is to adopt a means of storytelling which compresses and accelerates the passing years. Taking a leaf out of Chaosium's *Pendragon*, you may wish to try having each session played represent a year or more of game time. As the sessions, and the decades, begin to add up, the characters will experience time as vampires do. If you desire to run a chronicle in which the characters are powerful elders, the primogen of your city, why not start them off as fledglings two or three centuries ago and allow them to build up the experience, and the age appropriate to Kindred of their station?

Such techniques enhance players' impressions of immortality. It should be remembered that vampires are not timeless; they experience the passing of years as mortals do. Vampires, especially old vampires, must surely be bewildered at the rapidity with which new fads pass them by, and frightened by the pace with which humanity invents, then discards new wonders. Kindred born in ancient Rome may still be coming to grips with the repercussions of the 1960's, which ushered gay, black and women's rights on a global scale, let alone be ready to embrace fax machines and post-modernism. Frighten them with the threat of loosing touch with their mortality, and mortal existence. Bombard them with the modern age. Immerse them in it until they drown.

The Curse of Blood

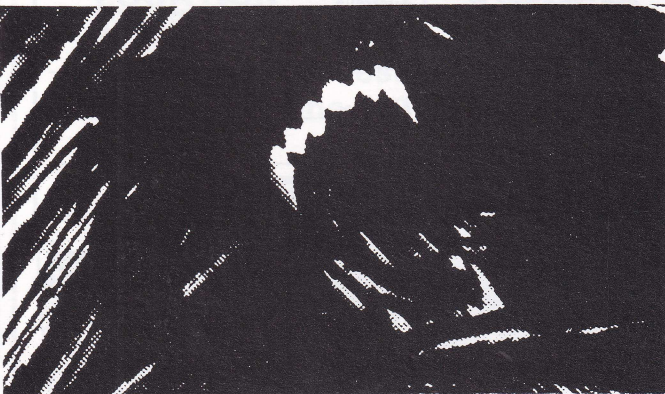
*"Fresh blood through tired skin,
New sweat to drown in,
Dress up this rotten carcass just to make it look alive."
Nine Inch Nails, "Last"*

The second central motif of *Vampire* is vitae, the stolen blood which sustains the Kindred. Like their endless existence, the thirst for blood is something which must never be excluded from a chronicle if it is to have the resonance Storytellers crave. Vampires are junkies, addicts of the worst kind. Blood keeps them "alive". Without fresh and constant drafts of blood, either a vampire dies, or her humanity dies, consumed by the beast. Either possibility is to be avoided at all costs.

Conveying a Cainites addiction can be difficult even for experienced Storytellers. Do not forget that as they move through the mortal world, maintaining the Masquerade, the Kindred are surrounded by blood. Its appetising aroma swirls around them as they walk down city streets. Every nightclub echoes with the susurrus of heartbeats, pumping liquid desire through enticingly fragile mortal vessels. Blood, lots of blood, confronts Kindred almost everywhere they go. Fledgling vampires should be forced to make Self-Control rolls constantly, in order to hold back their hunger. Until they learn restraint, the character should be reminded that every cell in their body cries out for another vitae fix. Elder vampires are more in control, but even they are still addicts; they've just learned to hide the symptoms of their craving with more proficiency.

Blood should be a constant feature of any *Vampire* chronicle, but should never dominate it. Half-hour mini-dramas involving tracking and feeding from a victim may not have their place in every session, but you should take care not to gloss over this central aspect of Cainite existence. Make sure your players have not become jaded by the hunt for blood. A hunt can be drawn out to provide an entire story's entertainment, especially early in a chronicle, and can have repercussions that return to haunt the characters months, even years later.

What if someone gets away from a vampire during feeding, or if the character is secretly observed as they drink? Might the mortal turn hunter, and track the vampire down? Do they desire vengeance, or lust after immortality themselves? From one casual feeding the character might contract a blood-carried disease, and become the spreader of a scourge more horrible than Caine's nightmares. Blood stains every vampire's life. The crimson fluid's potency as a storytellers tool should not be overlooked.



The Politics of the Damned

*"They want to take over,
My body and soul.
They don't stop demanding,
Until they reach their goal,
Sweeping through my bloodstream,
Like poison in my veins,
Breaking through the borders,
Tell me who's to blame."*

The Leather Strip, "Mortal Thoughts"

No matter their apparent age or their generation, all Kindred are caught up, often unknowingly, invariably unwillingly, in the Jyhad. The War of Ages taints every strata of vampire society, from the violent deeds of blustering anarchists to the behind-the-scenes machinations of entorpoed Methusalahs. The Jyhad should permeate your chronicle, although not always be an active element of the story. When it actively rears its head from the surrounding sea of paranoia, the Jyhad, seen without its obscuring miasma of feuds and infighting, should be as terrifying in its appearance as was Leviathan to Biblical mariners. Even potent nightmares can become dulled by the patina of familiarity.

Vampire politics are convoluted and multi-layered. The characters should never be sure of who is directing the show. Just when they think they have finally worked out who is manipulating who, and entire new element should appear on the scene. For example, do the characters think that the Ventrue, through the police they control, harassed the anarchists enough to manipulate them into instigating a riot in order to burn out a Nosferatu's haven? Then let them discover evidence suggesting that a powerful but nondescript Tremere, whom they have never taken much notice of before, actually coerced the Ventrue through a blood-bond into sparking off all the anarchists so that she could access said Nosferatu's underground library. And then the Tremere receives mysterious Russian visitors; is Baba Yaga behind it all?

You get the picture; as a *Vampire* storyteller, devious, to say nothing of complex, involved or downright evil, should be your middle name. The ever-present threat of Elders and Methuselahs should not be forgotten, nor the rumoured existence of the Antediluvians themselves. The threat of Gehenna is laughed at by some Kindred, and anticipated by others. The Sabbat are actively engaged in preventing Gehenna, believing the Camarilla an Antediluvian plot to keep Cainites quiescent; are they right? In *Vampire*, nothing is ever as it seems. A chronicle in which the characters start off thinking the Sabbat are bad guys, and end up on their side fending off Gehenna could be rewarding indeed.

Tragically Hip Anti-Heroes

"It was as I'd always feared, and it was as lonely, it was totally without hope. Things would go on as they had before, on and on. My search was over. I sat back listlessly, watching those licking flames."

Anne Rice, "Interview with the Vampire"

Immortality, blood and politics aside, the nucleus of *Vampire* is emotion. Vampires are damned. They are the Children of Caine, who was cursed by God, and they share their sire's fate. Angst, anxiety, catharsis, tragedy and psychodrama should be dominant elements of every *Vampire* game. Inspiring such emotions in players is a challenge, succeeding the sign of a true storyteller.

One must exercise subtlety and skill emotion-laden roleplaying. Rather than telling the players how to feel, create the mood through your words and performance. Dim lighting and appropriate music all add to the required atmosphere, but ultimately it is you who set the scene, and you who must convey the required emotional depth. Without the appropriate intensity on both sides, the moving scene you are attempting to impress on the players may evoke only silence and embarrassed giggles. Sensible, mature players who are interested in exploring their own emotions through the metaphor of *Vampire* are a godsend to storytellers, but even then, much of the work must come from you.

Non-player characters need to be realistic and three-dimensional, making regular appearances in the game, if the players are to find them memorable. Killing a total stranger in a brutal fashion provokes yawns. If the same bloody demise befalls a minor character with whom the characters have had many a nightclub conversation, then they are more likely to seek revenge. Similarly, the characters must be able to identify with NPCs in order to feel anything for them.

Never forget that a vampire's existence is one of tragedy. If they fall in love, they must sit and watch their lover grow old and die. They may lose the struggle with the beast just once, and accidentally slay the one they love, or give in to the beast completely, becoming a monster. Conscientious vampires will be wracked by guilt at their constant need for blood, and Kindred who kill may be haunted by their deeds in dreams, or in fact - nothing like a ghost to make a vampire's life miserable. Perhaps the spirit haunts the sire where they died, and every time the vampire passes by they see the same tormented face, or maybe the ghost follows them around, materialising on awkward occasions (trying to impress the Prince) or in embarrassing places (at the foot of the bed while the vampire is making love to a mortal paramour).

Vampires are spirits trapped inside undying bodies, with no escape save despair and suicide or the straw of Golconda at which so many Kindred clutch. Vampires are creatures of darkness. That is what they are and that is what their stories should become.■

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Retro Urban Escapism!

Disease has been the cause of more deaths in human history than all the wars experienced by mankind. This has continued up to the middle of the twentieth century when scientific medical procedures and high-technology warfare has reversed the balance. In role-playing games disease is often overlooked or treated in a purely random way. This article focuses on mid-fourteenth century Europe (the medieval era that is commonly used to form the basis of most campaign settings in fantasy roleplaying games) and how it was affected by the ravages of the bubonic plague.

A discussion of the spread of the plague and of attempts to control it will be followed by an examination of the short and long term consequences. Interspersed with the historical comment, I will relate how an epidemic can be used to create a different and dangerous milieu in a fantasy role-playing campaign.



The Black Death

An Essay on the Causes and Effects of the Bubonic Plague in Medieval Europe by Brad Martin

Europe Before The Plague

Europe's age of expansion between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries had come to an end. The population had ceased to grow as the wilderness available for clearing had run out. There was an increasing shortage of food, compounded by an unfavourable climatic change. To the disruption of a failing economy was added the problems of endemic warfare. The maritime states of Genoa and Venice fought for control of the Mediterranean trade, Italy was fought over by the Guelfs and Ghibellines, the Holy Roman Emperors and the popes struggled over temporal superiority, the cloth towns of Flanders revolted, and England and France began the Hundred Years War in 1337 AD. Warfare increased the tax burden on the peasantry, as governments struggled to raise and equip armies, and encouraged the emergence of local strongmen and bands of mercenaries. Europe was more divided than ever before, and its population weakened by famine and war. It was in no state to resist the Black Death.

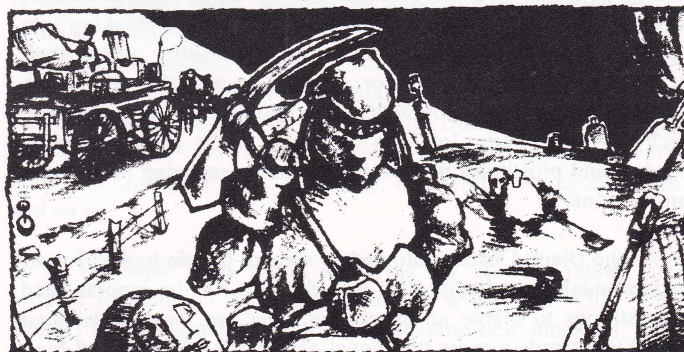
Origins and Spread

The plague bacillus, *Pasteurella pestis*, has a foci of infection in the foothills of the Himalayas between India and China, where it infects colonies of black rats. This focus would have remained isolated were it not for the expansion of the Mongol Empire, which at its peak encompassed China, Russia, Central Asia and Iraq. This empire created a favourable environment for the intensification of overland caravan movements, and for the

establishment of a postal network (in which messengers were capable of moving 100 miles per day). These movements brought *Pasteurella pestis* into contact with the rodents of the Eurasian steppe which flourished in the network of caravanserais. By this route the plague reached Crimea in 1346.

The Crimean Tartars blamed the Christians for the plague visited upon them, and besieged the Genoese fortress of Caffa. Plague-ridden corpses were catapulted into the city spreading the plague to the inhabitants. Three galleys fled the city reaching Genoa in January 1348 - the Black Death had reached Western Europe. Over the next three years the plague spread throughout Europe bringing a fearful devastation that the institutions of the day could not hope to handle.

This is the history of that struggle.



Methods of Dispersal

The black rat thrived in human settlements. When infected rats were bitten by fleas, the fleas too became infected. When in turn the flea transferred to a human host to feed, it passed on the plague.

The most common symptom of the plague was the buboes or boils, some as large as an apple, that usually appeared in the groin or armpits of the infected person. They soon spread to all parts of the body. As the disease progressed, the body became covered in black spots. Death usually followed quickly (the mortality rate varied from between 30 to 90 per cent). The course of the disease took five or six days. But there was a more virulent form of the plague, where the victim was struck with fever and coughed up blood, dying within two or three days (sometimes within a matter of hours). This form of the plague was not dependent on fleas for its spread, but could be transmitted through inhalation of droplets carrying bacilli expelled by the coughing or sneezing of an infected person.

As sea transport was the cheapest and most efficient way of transporting goods and people, the black rat and its cargo of fleas were rapidly transported from the Mediterranean ports to those of northern Europe. Once it became known that the plague had arrived at a port, many inhabitants fled for the purported safety of the countryside. When symptoms appeared in a village, again, those who could fled further inland. In this domino effect the plague was spread into the interior of Europe.

So many people fled from some cities that there was no-one left to bury the dead. In an attempt to stem the exodus taxes were sometimes imposed on those leaving. At other times guards had to be hired to keep the poor from revolting as most of the property owners had fled.

The people of medieval Europe did not associate the black rat with the spread of the disease, they did however come up with a number of causes for the plague. A popular theory was that a 'miasma' or poison cloud was shifting about Europe, striking down all who breathed in its airs. This miasma was said to be created by noxious gases released by earthquakes, the 'unbearable stench' let off by diseased bodies, or the movement of the stars.

The prevalence of the poor and the condition they lived in was also viewed, by the rich, as a breeding ground for disease. In Milan, when the appearance of the plague was first noticed, the houses of those concerned were bricked up until the inhabitants, sick or well, had died. In Florence, a group called *Becchini* carted away the dead, but they soon turned to extortion, breaking into houses and threatening to take away the healthy unless their demands were met. The poor, fleeing to a 'safe' city, were sometimes turned back by arrow fire. People obviously diseased, such as lepers, were also seen as agents of the plague, as were beggars and prostitutes who were seen to be engaging in 'unclean' professions.

As the Black Death continued to spread, people looked for an understandable explanation. It was difficult for the ignorant and superstitious to blame an unseen 'miasma', so they turned their thoughts towards a more traditional enemy. The Church had long

blamed the Jews for the death of Christ, and they had also become unpopular for being the money-lending class. Styled by the Church as hated agents of Satan, they were said to have spread the plague by poisoning the wells used by Christians. Massacres began in Provence, in May 1348 8,000 Jews were murdered in Strabourg, 12,000 in Mainz, 600 in Brussels. Over 350 massacres are recorded as having taken place. Some rulers attempted to protect their Jewish subjects, but in doing so risked the revolt of their Christian subjects. Other rulers co-operated in the massacres, burning Jews "for the honour of God", or washed their hands of the affair. Some 210 Jewish communities were destroyed, leading to a significant shift of population to Poland and Lithuania.

Roleplaying Applications

The referee should aim to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and growing panic. The plague can strike rich or poor, young or old, at anytime. All types of rumours as to its cause will prevail, but most will be spurious. As contacts die or flee, the player characters will become increasingly isolated. If they are foreigners, they may be attacked by the mob or imprisoned by the authorities. A player displaying obvious powers of sorcery may either be mobbed by desperate citizens seeking magical salves and amulets of protection, or attacked for having awoken the dark forces. Clerics and alchemists not seen to be tending the sick may be imprisoned or deported. Players wishing to find a logical solution to the plague will have to conduct extensive research on the victims, increasing their own exposure. They should be restricted to using, and extrapolating from, the ideas and tools available in the campaign world.

The Immediate Impact

As a minimum, one-third of Europe's population died from the Black Death. With an estimated total of 75 million, this amounts to about 24 million deaths. There was a great deal of disparity. Bohemia and Poland were barely touched, whilst northern Italy and Southern France were devastated.

Faced with imminent death many people abandoned their traditional occupations. Peasants stopped plowing, merchants closed their shops, and clerics stopped offering last rites. In Syria, "men and women, driven to despair, wandered around as if mad... cattle were left to stray unattended in the fields for no one had any inclination to concern themselves about the future." Old social, religious and familial bonds were broken as individuals sought to make the best use of what time they had left, "...resorting day and night now to this tavern, now to that, drinking with an entire disregard of rule or measure, and by preference making the houses of others, as it were, their inns... because the owners... had become as reckless of their property as their lives. In this extremity of our city's sufferings and tribulation the venerable authority of laws, human and divine, was abused and all but totally dissolved...".

As the Church did not provide sufficient solace or aid the poor, it lost the support of many of the faithful, who then resolved to find their own way to heaven. The Church had preached that faith alone would guarantee a place in heaven. The disillusioned revived the notion that good works would lead to the attainment of

salvation. Donations were made to the building of hospitals, wills stipulated that the poor be provided with a feast, private masses and chantry priests were funded, pilgrimage was made to religious shrines, and cult was given to new (poorer) saints.

Another facet of the wane of confidence in the institutionalised Church was the growth in mysticism. Mystics stressed that God lived in every individual and his presence could be felt by obedience, self-denial and prayer. This internalising of piety removed the need for a formal clergy.

The Flagellants

Mysticism reached an extreme with the emergence of the Brethren of the Cross - the Flagellants. Groups of 200 to 1,000 men and women marched throughout Germany, led by a group Master and his two lieutenants, carrying banners of purple velvet and cloth of gold. Upon entering a town they would form a circle and strip to the waist. Then they threw themselves to the ground, whereupon the Master moved among them and beat those who had committed crimes against the Brotherhood. Next all the Brethren arose and readying their heavy scourge, with three or four leather thongs tipped with metal studs, began beating their backs and breasts. Whilst this collective flagellation continued, the Master urged his flock to pray to God to have mercy on all sinners. The obvious passion and enthusiasm of the Flagellants appealed to the German peasants. Apart from the entertainment value, the villager hoped the blood would placate a vengeful God.

New recruits to the Brotherhood had to obtain the permission of their spouse, make a full confession, and have sufficient funds to pay 4 pence a day for food. They swore obedience to the Master and undertook not to shave, bathe, sleep in a bed, change their clothes or have conversation or intercourse with a member of the opposite sex.

As their favour increased they began to claim supernatural powers, such as being able to drive out devils, heal the sick, and raise the dead. Seeing themselves as an army of holy saints they denounced the Church hierarchy and disrupted Catholic services. However, the more radical they became, the more they lost the support of the merchants and lower nobility. Nevertheless, numbers increased as recruitment restrictions were lifted. In mid-1349 when the crusade reached the city of Constance, there were said to be 42,000 people in the Brotherhood.

The Flagellants had little long-term impact, but they do serve to demonstrate the magnitude of the psychological shock induced by the plague.



After the immediate die-off, the lot of the peasant improved markedly. The survivors received inheritances and took over vacant arable land. The shortage of labour improved their bargaining position with the landlord, leading to increased manumissions, lowering of rents and royal protection for land-holdings. As a corollary, the position of landowner worsened. As real wages increased they were not able to compete with manufacturers for labour, and serfs fled to the safety of the towns. Attempts were made to push back wages to pre-plague levels by having Statutes of Labourers passed, but these were ineffective.

Several cities, mostly Italian, introduced or modified sanitary legislation to combat the plague. Florence appointed a health commission to enforce the laws to ensure the forcible removal of "...all putrid matter and infected persons, from which might arise or be induced a corruption or infection of the air." The city of Pistoia ordered that no dead bodies be taken into the town for burial, that used clothing be barred from city trade, and funeral processions were banned. The sanitary legislation also included controls on prostitutes and sodomites, because the activities of these individuals were thought offensive to God and could bring down the plague on the city.

Mostly, these efforts were in vain.

Roleplaying Applications

Player characters selling goods or their labour should be able to demand higher prices, whilst those who are landowners or manufacturers will be hit with higher costs. The latter may have to increase security to prevent their serfs or labourers absconding. Players travelling from one city to another may run foul of sanitary legislation, but if they come from a plague-free city they will have intelligence on a destination of interest to the wealthy. Pious clerics in the party will find much to attract them in the Flagellant movement. Others will find that joining bands of revellers and debauchers will be more to their taste (although just as dangerous to their health). Opportunities for pillaging, rape, and general banditry abound as law and order breaks down.

Generally, the referee should strive to create the image of 'a world turned upside down', where all the old certainties and traditions are discredited. It is a time of transition where old gods are disappearing and new ones emerging. A night of prayer may no longer be good enough to recover treasured spells. Magical devices could lose their powers, and spirits may fight even more fiercely to avoid being bound.

The Long-Term Impact

An economic rationalist would explain that this massive loss of human life was an inevitable result of Europe's overpopulation, and merely returned the continent to demographic reality. However, the Black Death was not a once only experience, the epidemic recurred every few years until the end of the fifteenth century. Even though these latter recurrences killed no more than 10 to 15 percent of the population, their frequency reduced Europe's population below the optimum restricting economic and social development for centuries.

The economic recession heightened disparities in wealth, leading to violence between the poor and the ruling classes. The *Jacquerie* in France rose in rebellion, burning manor-houses and killing nobles. The peasantry of south and east England took up arms and occupied London for a time in 1381. These revolts had some success, forcing the ruling classes to make concessions, ending the manorial system and protecting peasant land tenure. A prosperous peasantry, or yeomanry, began to emerge benefiting from supplying the growing towns. Greater costs and lack of labour forced landlords to move to the towns and become *rentiers*, or to switch from wheat farming to the less labour intensive animal husbandry. The move from wheat in the West made grain production in Eastern Europe more profitable. In this part of Europe there were few towns for the peasants to flee to, so the landlords successfully secured their labour force by tying it to the land as serfs (a situation that was to survive into the late nineteenth century).

Technological change was stimulated by the need for products and processes that would compensate the reduction in the labour force. Eyeglasses, gunpowder, clocks, the printing press, salting fish at sea, and deep-shaft mining are all innovations of post-Black Death Europe. Rather than quantity, the emphasis of industrial production was on quality.

A shift of political focus occurred, away from the land-owning nobility and clergy, to the monarchies and urban centres. The disappearance of some powerful noble families, the declining military importance of the knights, and the decreased significance of agriculture weakened the ties of vassalage. Monasteries were particularly hard hit by the plague, and as a result lost their monopoly of education and hence literacy. Monarchs were forced to turn to the secular world for their source of bureaucrats. Trained in Roman Law, the new generation of royal officials began a process of state development that emphasised the centre at the expense of local government. Nobles were henceforth absorbed into the impersonal organisation of the state, totally dependent on the patronage of the monarch. Towns controlled by autonomous patrician councils were threatened from below by artisans seeking to gain a say in their governance, and from above by the territorial prince demanding taxation rights.

The conviction that plague spread by contagion rather than air, resulted in the provision of plague hospitals (*lazaretto* - pest house). These institutions were not intended as places of treatment, but as prisons for the infected. Towns hoped to stop the plague from entering by ordering their gatekeepers to keep out "scoundrels, swindlers and the poor, or other people on foot who came begging". Markets, festivals, and processions were cancelled as it was feared that any large gathering of people would poison the air. The more organised Italian cities introduced regulations that required people to undergo a period of quarantine before being allowed to enter. Ships were required to anchor in a secluded place for forty days before their crew could disembark.

Roleplaying Applications

Player character landowners will find their estates gradually becoming less profitable. Only by adopting new techniques and by diversifying into activities such as industry and mining will they continue to maintain their status. Kings and princes may also be more assertive, demanding taxation in cash rather than military service, and expecting that castles and retainers be made subject to the crown. Those attempting to remain autonomous may face a royal army crossing their borders.

The aftermath of the great plague will see the emergence of numerous cults, many of these will be branded as heresy by the established religion. Players may find advantage in starting up such a cult -possibly using it to overthrow the weakened authorities. Involvement in urban or peasant uprisings may also present opportunities for advancement. Such uprisings and the reactions that follow are very destructive, and could damage PC assets, upset travel plans, and destroy patronage networks.

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SHADOWRUN AUSTRALIA

PART IV - AN UPDATE ON THE UPCOMING SOURCEBOOK

By the time you read this I will be finalising the last section of the manuscript that FASA Corporation's Tom Dowd will develop into **Shadowrun's** Australian Sourcebook.

While the final product won't be available for some time yet the project has been on the boil now for quite literally years. The process has been a long one that I hope in the end will please all concerned. We at Realms plan on keeping you up to date with news upon the sourcebook and related products as their release date nears. We will also keep you supplied with overviews and expansions upon what is covered within the final book. Add to all this a handful of scenarios in the same popular style as issue 15's *Stranglehold* and you will agree this is the venue for Shadowrun with a unique, different and Australian flavour.



SO, WHAT'S COVERED?

The Australian sourcebook spans a wide group of topics and territory. It of course covers Australia, but in 2055 one person's definition of what that is can differ a great deal to the next. The final manuscript details in all six nations, from the Antarctic Free Corporate State (AFCS), to the Australian Republic (the City-States), Tir Miallae, Singapore (the Fortress-State), New Zealand and Te Ika a Maui. But, whether all of these will be included in the final product is up to FASA and will be dependent on space considerations and the like. The manuscript also deals extensively with the Exclusion Zone (EZ), the Dreamtime dominated interior of Australia.

The major sections of the work will be similar to that of the other national sourcebooks such as Germany, London (UK), Tir nan nOg and Tir Tairngire. Space will be given to the matters of government, society, the economy, crime, the Dreamtime, history and extensive detail will be given to many of the Australian city-states, such as the Brisbane Plex, the Adelaide twin cities, the Perth Sprawl and the heart of Australia; the Axis cities of the Sydney Orbital, Canberra and Greater Melbourne.

WHAT WILL REALMS PRINT FOR IT?

Australian Realms will continue to support this setting as it has ever since its birth in the magazine in '92 (issue 6-9, 11 & 15) starting next issue with *official* material. From issue 20 a series of short articles dealing with each of the five major city-states will see print. Some of these profiles will also be published with scenarios, by the time this series has run its course the sourcebook may very well be available...

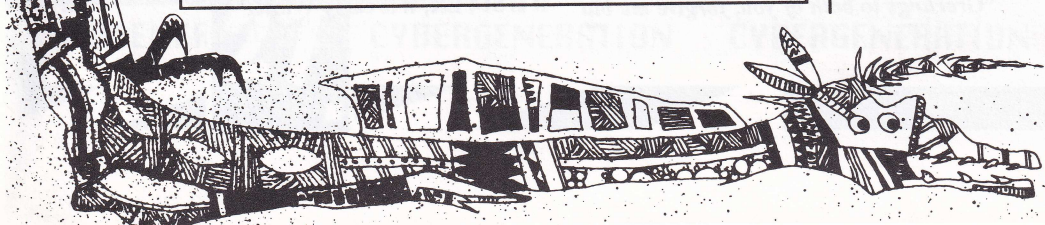
WHEN WILL IT BE HERE?

When we have a fixed release date from FASA, Realms will be the first to advise you, until then look for tasters here.

If, of course, you don't want to wait you can grab the back issues with the original source articles in, otherwise you'll just have to sit tight.

COMING NEXT ISSUE...

In 2055 the dominant power in the Australian Republic is the *Axis*; the city-states of the Sydney Orbital, Canberra and Greater Melbourne. While they are the heart of the republic, Adelaide's MFP is the brains, and that city-state will be the first in our new series.



OSSARD

Den of Total Corruption:

It may have taken near on two full months to arrive but finally a column of a hundred Sankta Glavos looked upon the shadowed spires of Ossard. The expedition's leader, Inquisitor Calboni watched his knights and patiently awaited his fifty Inquisitors to also draw up alongside him. Allowing them all to gaze upon the corrupt city.

Many made wards of protection. Some muttered prayers.

A few brave men shed tears.

Ossard sat upon a small harbour, its grey walls stained, seeming dark and menacing. Over the city hung a pall, a cold shadow that made even the overcast sky seem cheery. As the wind changed direction it brought desperate cries of torment and pleasure. Ossard, den of total corruption beckoned them. Lowering visors and holding a joint prayer to both Krienta and St Baimio, the Church of Baimiopia's finest headed down into the valley. Inquisitor Calboni proudly raised the Holy Sword of St Baimio and sang...

In Ossard other voices also rose in song.

* * *

Sentry Sef Scantazzi paced his lone patrol around St Baimio's Cathedral, the most revered site in all of the Holy City of Baimiopia. It was dark, but less than an hour before dawn. Already initiates and the lower orders of priests would be rousing themselves, no doubt some would be talking of what was on everyone's minds; the salvation of Ossard. It was supposed to be a secret, but all in the holy orders had heard of the northern city-state's fall to the Kults of the Horned God. So too had they heard of the elven threat to take Ossard should the Heletian nations not be able to manage the crisis. Sef chuckled to himself, "*For Krienta's sake!*" They had taken a full third of the Inquisition and met with a hundred Sankta Glavos Knights before heading to the city. The kults had not a hope, any day now news was expected, news of salvation. Something dripped on him.

Looking up from under St Baimio's high eaves he could see no clouds in the predawn sky. Again drops hit his arm, coming from the Cathedral's roof.

More drops.

Some trailed down his face, he wiped at them, his hand coming away red.

Anxiously he looked above into the lightening sky, backing away from the Cathedral until he could see the spires, then he screamed.

* * *

As dawn took the Holy City priests and initiates scurried like they were possessed. Many were prone, crying or praying. All were oblivious to the passing of the true messenger of doom, a lone hooded figure carrying nothing more than a grim smile.

He knew he would find His Holiness Verrocchio, mortal head of the Church, in an urgent predawn congress with King Giovanni of Greater Baimiopia. The two trying to decide what to tell an important merchant council that was to be opened in just a few short hours.

As he climbed the steps of the Citadel he glared at any who dared even contemplate stopping him. As he made his way to Verrocchio's audience chamber he was joined by first one and then other robed figures. Finally he reached the chamber, shadowed by a dozen Cabalists.

* * *

"Verrocchio, what has happened to our force? What can I tell the nobles and merchants who need to hear something with certainty?"

The Holy Benefice stirred restlessly in his chair, looking across at his sovereign.

"Our force of salvation should have taken the city near on a month ago, while news of the battle is late in arriving it must surely not be far away my King."

"Not far away! Have you heard the rumours. They know! The whole city knows, even of the elven threat! It has also been said that Forwao landed in Porto Baimio and is on his way. If we don't get good news soon there will be panic!" The King paced, distracted only by the opening doors.

In strode a hooded man, followed by a dozen others. The King and Verrocchio stared in disbelief at the interruption.

"Don't be upset. I bring news of Ossard."

The man threw back his hood to reveal pointed ears, bowing low he again spoke.

"Greetings to both of you, forgive me but

I will dispense with the formalities for I have grave news."

King Giovanni surveyed the dozen men behind the elf, their rune covered robes and amulets marking them as Cabalists. Men who prior to Ossard's fall wouldn't have dared walk in the city of Baimiopia.

"Forwao, I would presume?"

"Correct, King Giovanni."

"So, what is the news from Ossard?"

"Behold!" The elf walked across to the shuttered window, the King noticing for the first time the faint cries and muffled screams coming from the street below. Forwao threw open the shutters revealing the skyline of the city's holy buildings, silhouetted by the sunrise. The cries grew louder, and seemed to issue from many throats. The King stood and with Verrocchio walked to the window, both staring in horror at the scene in front of them. Upon the holy building's spires were the impaled silhouettes of scores of men, the inquisitors and knights of the Ossard expedition. On the Cathedral roof several priests tried to fetch a pinned figure that still showed signs of life.

Forwao stood behind them and smiled.

"You have failed to take Ossard, and it is now Winter. We both know that you are unable to send another force, so I have advised High King Caemarou of Wair-Rae to take Ossard, and slaughter the misguided souls within it. Yes King Giovanni, within two months war will have come to Dormetia."

The King didn't reply, merely looked at the hysterical people in the street below, so Forwao continued "Pray to your god that these kultists don't claim another of your cities, for if they do we will give you no such chance to take it back!"

And with that he turned and left. The Cabalists were mostly silent, some smiled, one laughed. They too left. The King remained with Verrocchio, but chose to speak to himself. "So, war it is. We will need to stay back and watch from afar. I fear Wair-Rae is a behemoth that is just starting to stir."

Verrocchio sighed "Krienta save us!"

In the streets below panic spread.

It is 514 EK, it is early Winter ☉

of players regularly) become greater. I've always enjoyed boardgames and Society for Creative Anachronism revels, and that hasn't stopped me from remaining an avid AD&D gamer.

What *Forgotten Realms* projects are in the works?

Future Realms projects that I can tell you about right now include the upcoming City of Splendours boxed set, which replaces FR1 and the City System box, to become the definitive guide to Waterdeep; Steve Schend's done a magnificent job on it... and in 1995, a boxed set called the Ruins of Zhentil Keep should be coming out... from that title even Volo can figure out what it's about! There's also a boxed set called Spellbound in the works, that'll give us all a good look at Thay, Rashemen, and Algarond!

Volo (not to be confused with that impostor "Marco Volo") continues to explore the Realms, with Volo's Guide to the Sword Coast this fall, and Volo's Guide to Cormyr next year. I'm writing both of those, and right now I'm also thoroughly enjoying creating an "FOR"-type sourcebook entitled The Seven Sisters (starring Alustriel, Dove, Laeral, The Simbul, Storm, Sylund... and I wonder who the seventh is? We'll have to see...). As several of these lovely ladies are powerful mages, you can expect to see a wagonload of spectacular new wizard spells in its pages!

I'm also awaiting Elminster's Ecologies, due out early this fall, to see what it reveals of the Realms (no, I didn't write this one; Elminster went behind my back to find other willing scribes), and I'm afraid most of the other Realms projects are still

secret (that is, I haven't found out about them yet!). Some of the planned projects that have been talked about but not yet set in some definite products sound very exciting, but it wouldn't be responsible for me talk about them and then leave Realms fans hanging if they never appear, or get changed into something else.

We hope you'll enjoy a wonderful time in Australia.

I've never been to Australia before, and I'm looking forward to seeing it; for my wife, going to Australia is a lifetime dream. I'd like Realms fans to know that I want to hear from them, c/o TSR - even if I can't always find time to write answers to every letter I get, I do read them all, and I heed your wishes. Tell me, and tell the good folks at TSR, what you like and want more of, and also what you didn't care for and don't want to see more of... that's the best way for us all to enjoy game products of lasting value, things we'll enjoy for years to come, and for those who created them, can be proud of. I'd also like to urge all lonely gamers to seek out the RPGA - in Australia Wes Nicholson's your man - if they want to play with or against other gamers. There are a host of other things I'd like to babble about... but there's always something else waiting for me to write, or time running short before the daily drive to the library, so.. that's all for now!

Thank you, Ed.

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she is frequently subjected to a "Trial of Faith". Such trials involve numerous questions with regard to the cult's theology, as well as a rigorous physical challenge.

Allies and Enemies

You have contacts with both the Rads and the Vidiots, as these groups provide you with a valuable means of spreading propaganda in order to discredit your enemies. In addition, the more public-minded and environmentally aware Cultie groups have been known to associate with the Guardians and the EcoRaiders. On the other hand, you are vehemently opposed to the existence of the Goths, whom you regard as the servitors of Satan and other Dark Gods! Culties have been known to become involved in vicious conflicts against Goth gangs, with no quarter asked on either side. The most reviled of all Cultie enemies, however, is the ISA! Virtually all Cultie groups view the ISA as the servitors of Satan, and President Whindam is said by many to be the devil incarnate! As such, Culties frequently clash with ISA agents and are constantly plotting the death of David Whindam and the CEP.

Slang

Baptism: To take a bath or shower.

Beelzebub: President David Whindam.

Hermit: A particularly fanatical or deranged Cultie.

Infidel: Anyone who isn't a Cultie.

Purification: The punishment of those who oppose a Cultie.

The Unholy: The ISA.

Yogang Skill: Rant (EMP)

As a Cultie, you are skilled in expounding on why your particular theology is the true faith (Easy), recruiting new devotees (Difficult), conducting convincing exorcisms (Average), screaming rabid curses (Easy) and generally ranting and raving. On a good day, you may be able to come up with such horrible threats of divine retribution and foam at the mouth enough to convince a Mega-Violent gang not to scrum you (Very Difficult). You may even be able to convince a policeman that the mono-katana you're carrying is in fact a sacred relic (Difficult), but persuading people that you are really quite normal is asking a bit much (Nearly Impossible)!

If You're a Cultie:

- (1) Tell me your name, age and sex.
- (2) Describe what you look like.
- (3) Besides your V-Trodes, pick four different things from the list below that you are currently carrying:
Long black or brown armoured (SP18) monastic robes. Large religious symbol on thick chain (1D6 damage as a club). Loudspeaker. Thick "Holy Book". Vial of "Holy Water". Light Pistol. Religious Propaganda Pamphlets.



EINSTEINS

"It's as easy as $E=MC^2$ "

"Lethal fun with household chemicals! It doesn't get any better than this!"

"Did someone leave a bunsen burner on?... KABOOM!!!!"

You're an Einstein, continuing the centuries-long tradition of brilliant but slightly unhinged scientific investigation. You are obsessed with any aspect of the sciences, as long as it can be put to a practical (and fun) use. Your methods are not always the soundest, your goals are often of dubious moral and legal standing, and you are viewed by many as total loonies, but you don't care. In fact, all you are really interested in is successfully reproducing that oxide that made your cat jump in loops when it sniffed the stuff... or splitting that mutant rhinoceros embryo you "acquired" and implanting it into a rock wallaby... or discovering just why your baby sister acts so strangely when subjected to strong electromagnetic pulses!

Einsteins are a product of the corporate scientific research arcologies in which your parents work and live. Left without parental supervision and bored by the corporate education program, you and your goboy friends found other ways to occupy yourselves. The resulting use (and abuse) of corporate research labs is not viewed charitably by the corporation, although you think it's great fun.

What You Look Like

As an Einstein, you dress like your scientist parents do - with some twists. Oversized, stolen corporate lab coats are the order of the day, but each coat has graffiti scribbled onto it along with bizarre chemical stains, acid burns and rips.

The graffiti is not entirely meaningless, however. Each Einstein inscribes a record of his various achievements, as well as his more bizarre or spectacular failures, for the world to see. The more graffiti a particular Einstein has on his coat, the greater his experience and seniority within the yogang. Whenever possible, you carry with you a small bag containing the instruments of your obsession - crumpled pages from scientific textbooks, scalpels, microscopes, specimen jars, mini-burners, syringes, bottles of chemicals, electrodes and mini-computers.

Subculture

The life of an Einstein revolves around the use and abuse of science for interesting and entertaining ends. You are interested in science for science's sake, rather than for money or as a power-making tool. Whilst the life of an Einstein can often be a solitary one, with hours spent sneaking around corporate labs pursuing your own research, a group of Einsteins may occasionally gather to work on a major project of great importance or fun, or simply to share ideas and display their latest discoveries. Whilst Einstein yogangs are usually made up exclusively of members of a particular research arcology, there are times when large numbers of Einsteins from far and wide meet at an event which can only be labelled a "Mad Scientists' Convention".

The major way to gain respect in your group is to make some incredible new and bizarre discovery, then display it to all who are interested. These displays are regarded as extremely important and exciting events, if only because they often involve a vast pyrotechnic conflagration, the release of a new laxative gas into the arcology's ventilation system, the definitive proof the President Whindam is an alien puppet, or some other similarly bizarre revelation!

Einsteins are interested in all areas of the sciences, be it physics, chemistry, geology, astronomy, electronics, biomedicine, psychology, cybernetics or the age-old science of persuading your friends and relatives to test potentially lethal new discoveries! Long-time friends of Einsteins have been known to break into a run at the very mention of the phrases: "No really, it's quite safe!", "Would you mind holding this electrode for just a minute?", or "It won't hurt a bit. In fact, you'll probably enjoy it!". The sad fact is that many overly adventurous Einsteins and their unwitting friends have come to unfortunate ends whilst in the process of testing their latest and greatest discovery. You, however, would never be so reckless... would you?!

Belonging

Becoming an Einstein was a matter of being in the right place, with the right interests. You were the sort of baby that tried to find out what was in that shapeless stuff the corporations pass off as food, and your inquisitive nature led you onto bigger, better and more pyrotechnic things. As you grew, you took an interest in the scientific activities that took place in the arcology around you, gradually piecing together a knowledge of various scientific areas via observation, the instruction of your teachers and parents, and your own abuse of basic household chemicals. Once you and some similarly-minded friends found a way into the sealed corporate labs, however, the fun really started! This group of friends was eventually either asked to join an existing group of Einsteins within the arcology (because they were so impressed with your achievements), or you formed a separate yogang yourselves. Once accepted into an Einstein yogang, your knowledge of the sciences grew at a terrific rate - especially in the area concerning creative modification of industrial cleaning agents!

Allies and Enemies

Einsteins are treated with a combination of awe and amusement by many other yogangs. Their strange appearance, interests and behaviour are all regarded as hilarious by the majority of 'gangers, but the practical aid that can be given by the Einsteins is so great that few can afford to directly insult these young geniuses. Groups such as the BeaverBrats, EcoRaiders, Rads, TinkerTots and Vidiots are all on good terms with the Einsteins because they often make use of the various gizmos, chemicals, raw explosives and obscure information that can be provided by them. In return, the Vidiots and BeaverBrats are often called upon to acquire hard to find information or raw materials, whilst the TinkerTots have been known to aid in the construction of many new Einstein gizmos. In addition, the ArcoRunners are often on friendly terms with the Einsteins.

There are many who regard the Einsteins as a scourge upon the Earth, however. These include BoardPunks, Goths, MegaViolents, GoGangers and Moshers who regard Einsteins as nerds and wimps who deserve to be scrummed. By far the worst opponents of an Einstein is CorpSec. These corporate security flunkies constantly interfere with the clandestine activities of Einsteins - preventing entry into sealed labs, seizing unauthorised equipment and even stealing discoveries made by the kids and passing them onto the corporate researchers!

Slang

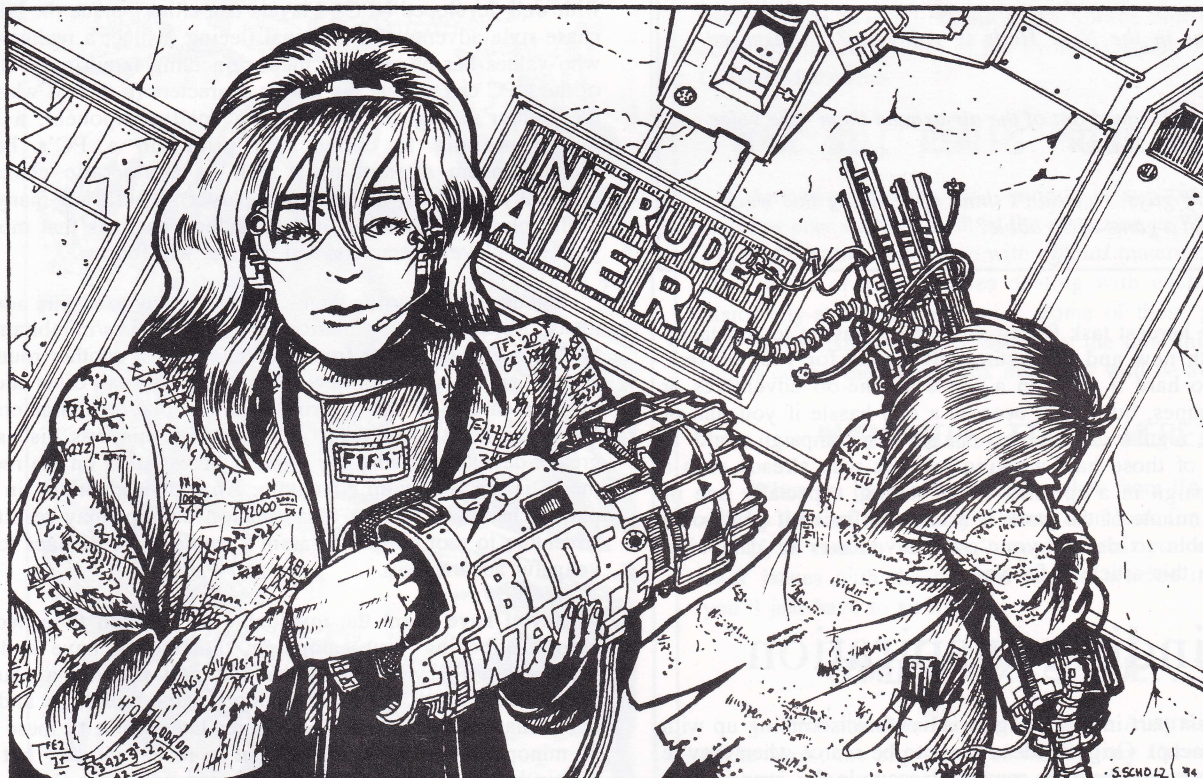
Acid Mop: an old lab coat.
Albert: a very smart person or great discovery.
Fudge: a failed experiment. Also to sabotage a corp lab.
Playtime: to infiltrate a corporate lab.
Show and Tell: the display of a new discovery.

Yogang Skill: Wing It (INT)

As an Einstein, you have a wealth of general scientific information at your disposal. This allows you to "wing it" at times, and come up with any scientific knowledge appropriate to the situation. This may involve the identification of a common species (Easy), analyse a basic chemical compound (Average), make Difficult mathematical calculations, mix weak forms of explosive (Difficult), identify and treat common illnesses (Average to Very Difficult), create new chemicals (Very Difficult), and even genetically alter embryos (Nearly Impossible). Life is one big scientific learning experience, the world is your lab!

If You're An Einstein

(1) Tell me your name, age and sex. (2) Describe what you look like. (3) Besides your V-Trodes, pick four different things from this list: Corporate labcoat (lightly armoured, SP14). Scalpels (1D6 damage), surgical kit. Mini-computer. Smart-goggles (vision aid). Electronics kit. Scientific textbooks (1D4). Household chemicals in vials (1D8).



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CYBERGENERATION

CYBERGENERATION

CYBERGENERATION

D.I.Y. DUNGEONS

By Alan Ogden

As soon as Bern awakened she knew that something was wrong. Cracking her eyes open the merest fraction, she scanned the room. Nothing. Moving cautiously she rose from her sleeping mat and went to the door. Still nothing, yet every nerve in her body screamed that something wasn't right.

Quickly she donned her clothing, slipped on her mail shirt and strapped her sword about her waist. After a moment's thought she grabbed her satchel and stuffed a few essentials into it. Hand on the hilt of her sword she opened the door and moved into the corridor beyond. As she moved down the stairs she was joined by her comrades - Arnus One-eye and Erik the Red. Neither spoke.

Together they came down the stairs and into the inn's common room. The room was filled with its usual occupants but no-one moved except the bartender Clyde. He was polishing glasses with a mechanical motion more frightening than the stillness of the patrons.

"What in the Nine Hells is going on?" whispered Bern.

A voice boomed out of the air around them - the voice of the Games Master.

"Sorry guys, I couldn't think of anything this week - how about a game of Scrabble?"

About the hardest task facing a referee is having to constantly come up with new and interesting adventures for your players. This isn't too hard if you run a series of one-off adventures or occasional games, but it can become a real hassle if you run, or intend to run, regular gaming sessions set in a campaign world. If you are one of those hard-working referees who already runs a regular campaign in a specific world setting, especially one in which every minute of the game is accounted for, or if you would like to be able to design your own adventures or campaign settings, then this article is for you.

Finding Inspiration

The hardest part in designing an adventure is coming up with the initial concept. Original ideas seem to be scarce when they're needed the most but there are several places to look - even in your own campaign notes if you take the time to read them again. Areas of your campaign world, favoured NPC's, past adventures and all that campaign background you've prepared and held back for a 'rainy day' - all of these areas can provide fertile ground for new adventures.

Rediscovering interesting areas of your world allows you to generate a location-based adventure, this being a scenario in which the locale provides the framework upon which the adventure is based. These locales could be anything from ancient castles to newly discovered dungeons, a busy metropolis to isolated villages, abandoned temples to rich tombs, mountain passes to wooded plains. Part of the adventure may lie in finding out about the locale (exact location, history, rumours, maps etc.), part in reaching it, and part in exploring and surviving the setting itself. Getting out may also provide adventure - sometimes the hardest thing about gaining a dragon's hoard is hanging on to it! The major disadvantage to this type of adventure is that it has to fit into your game world. As discussed in my previous article - *Raising the Stones*, Australian Realms Issue 11 - having too many interesting settings in one area of your game world can stretch its credibility, while spreading them out can stretch your resources.

Basing an adventure around a favoured or specially created non-player character is one way of avoiding this; rather than a location being the focal point of the adventure, an NPC becomes the focus. This type of adventure can occur almost anywhere within reason, and adds to the drama of the adventure as players love to interact with well-developed NPCs. Players can either pursue the NPC in a chase-style adventure (a criminal fleeing justice, a reclusive sage who values her privacy, an inept princeling requiring protection) or the NPC can pursue the player characters (a wizard who wants the fighter's magical sword for a spell component, a bounty hunter seeking to collect the price on a PC's head, a kidnap/ransom attempt on a rich or aristocratic character - especially good for an absentee player). There are many more useful plotlines available, just consider what it is that motivates your non-player characters, and the rest will follow.

The use of a recurring theme is another way to inspire adventure ideas. Re-using old scenarios with new twists/inhabitants and NPC comebacks (either from the dead or just another round) can provide great sources for new adventures. This will often add depth to your campaign by ensuring that the player characters' past comes back to haunt them. (Once again, this was discussed in greater detail in *Raising the Stones*). A variation on the recurring theme is the follow-up adventure. An initial adventure in which player characters foil an assassination attempt may result in an adventure to root out the assassin's employer or perhaps to elude vengeful accomplices.

If you have spent the invaluable preparation time necessary before launching your campaign, then you'll have a detailed background for your campaign that will provide a source of adventures for you. When designing a game world, try and insert hooks that can become full adventures later. Some of these should be minor plots that you don't want to reveal initially but which remain bubbling away on the backburner ready to be served up to players anxious for new delights. Others are major hidden developments held in reserve for the moment when you and the players are ready for them. This is something we do with each Unae region as we develop it, providing little teasing snippets for GMs to pick up on and use in their own Unae campaigns.

Whenever your players enter a new area, read over the background notes you made when developing your campaign world and this will suggest ideas and locations for new adventures.

The campaign background is not the only type of background available to you for adventure ideas. When they create new characters, insist that your players provide them (and you) with detailed backgrounds and histories. This can be as detailed as you (or your players) want. This has a twofold effect, the first being that your players will be more attached to their characters from the beginning since they have had to put more effort into creating them. The second benefit is that by doing this, your players will also provide you with possible ideas for adventures and, more importantly, good motives for pursuing them.

Another useful source of inspiration for plot lines, but one that should be used sparingly, is divine intervention. This device is one that works better in a campaign setting where the gods are traditionally meddling (eg. Greek or Roman) and where the divine powers are very well detailed. Gods, being omnipotent, can do pretty much what they want to player characters and there is very little that the players can do about it - characters can be plunged into trials of great adversity without having any idea as to the reason for their plight.

This technique gives you many of the same freedoms as the one-off adventure, as the characters can literally be plucked out of their current situation and into one of the god's choosing. However, if you don't want to be accused of unjustly manipulating events then make sure the intervention comes as a consequence of the player's actions. For example, a cleric might pray to her god for aid in a particular situation and be told her wish is granted, but in return for a short special service, and the adventure follows.

One of the best things you can do is keep a notebook of ideas for possible adventures. Anytime you have an idea for an adventure, jot it down in the book, sketching it out with just enough detail so that you can reconstruct it at a later date. When noting your ideas, never allow your inhibitions to intrude - all ideas are valuable no matter how insignificant, absurd or difficult to stage they might originally appear. It doesn't matter if the adventure is immediately useful or not as the notebook is simply intended as a source of potential adventures. Just leafing through it every now and then can restore your inspiration and spark other ideas. The great thing about the notebook is that as you look through it, many of your ideas conceived at different times will join together as if by magic to form a much larger, more coherent and challenging adventure concept.



Once you have decided on which of your sketches to use you can begin to flesh it out. Remember though, don't spend too much time developing an idea until you actually intend to run it, as things in your campaign can change quite dramatically from one adventure to the next. For example, characters will change - either by gaining new abilities, magic items, skills or by losing existing ones; the setting will change - as players travel to new areas of your world; and the context of the campaign will change - as players either defeat old enemies, or make new ones. These, and many other potential changes, can effect how easy or difficult an adventure is for your players or even how relevant it is to your campaign.

When repeatedly trying to come up with your own original adventure ideas it isn't always possible or even necessary to avoid cliches and hackneyed themes. They are a referee's best friend - all the hard work has been done, and the players don't need to have the cliché explained to them. But when using hackneyed themes always add something of your own; add a unique twist that takes the players by surprise. Players who think they know where an adventure is heading are easy to sucker - even with the most obvious ploys. Do it often enough and players will begin to look for twists that aren't there.

Which brings me to my next point. Don't be afraid to use other people's ideas...

Beg, Steal and Borrow!

You don't always have to use your own ideas. Frequently your players will come up with something that never even occurred to you. If you are lucky, you'll have a player in your group that knows how a referee feeds off player input and she'll actually go out of her way to put words into your mouth that help keep the action rolling. Even if you can't use a player's suggestion when it comes up, note it down somewhere so that you can develop and use it later. If the player recognises it as their own then chances are they'll be pleased, feeling fully involved in the creative process of running the game.

Books, movies and television are usually recognised as another great source of ideas for potential adventures. What I suggest, however, is to once again introduce variations to add value to the idea. If you've ever thought that a movie would have been better if ..., or that the protagonist in a book should have ..., then using the plot/villain/scenario as the core of your next adventure could be the way to go. Once again players may recognise bits and pieces but if you change things around enough it won't do them much good.

Lifting characters from various popular culture sources can also make things interesting. If the barkeeper has a Germanic accent, bulging muscles and eyes that glow red your players will know that picking a fight with him is a bad idea. They won't be back. By using recognisable characters and scenes you can often create a mood for an adventure that may otherwise be lacking. It can also be a subtle way of giving your players clues and hints. They may not be Indiana Jones, but if your players are told they're entering the "Temple of Doom" they'll know to be on their toes.

Speaking of books, have you tried the local library? True history is often stranger than fiction and there are many good books on Dark Ages, Medieval and Renaissance history that will provide untold inspiration and adventure ideas. In fact this is the method of the *Historical Perspectives* series of articles we've been running in *Australian Realms*. Say you are looking for a dynasty of power brokers to spice up your campaign, then why not research the exploits of the Medici family of Renaissance Italy; or, if it's a secretive order of fanatical killers you're after, look up the Assassins of Crusader Syria; or if you want to detail a pious holy man who dramatically deviates from the rules of the state

religion, read the history of St Francis of Assisi. These are only three examples of the thousands of historical figures, organisations and events which can be used to flesh out a fantasy campaign. If it is a modern setting you are running then a quick read of the daily newspaper, or watching the 6 o'clock news bulletin will inevitably throw up events suitable for your game.

Other sources of inspiration are prepackaged modules from the game publishers (and don't restrict yourself to those of your specific game system - there are plenty of good ideas in most modules which can be readily adapted to your preferred system), songs, friends, family - anything that gets you thinking of plot lines, characters and possible adventures. Thus, if you play fantasy RPG's there is no reason you can't use the basic plot from a western of thriller for your next adventure. The same applies to science fiction and horror role-playing games.

CAUTION: One important thing to remember about plagiarism is that you must not seek to profit from it - don't try and sell material with someone else's ideas as the central concept or you could find yourself involved in an adventure of the legal kind.

Now Cut The Cloth

Having finally decided on your initial idea you may still need to decide on the style or type of adventure - action, problem solving, roleplaying or a combination of them all. Often the style will be predetermined, either by the idea itself or by the particular way you and your players prefer to play the game.

As the 'name implies, the 'action adventure' relies primarily on the physical aspects of the game. While I find these adventures the easiest to write, and easiest to ad lib on the night (if things are lagging you simply open the book of monsters and slot in another encounter), I also find that the most critical aspect is pacing the adventure. If it takes too long to resolve a combat or to circumvent an obstacle then the pace slows and the adventure soon becomes less enjoyable.

When determining pace it is important to understand your players and how they play, as well as the abilities of their characters. Try to avoid throwing huge numbers of opponents at the PC's as this slows things down. I feel that it is better to keep the number of combatants down to a manageable size; creating just a few opponents whose abilities match the player characters fairly evenly. This in turn keeps dice rolling to a minimum. Also try to make sure that each combat is staged differently from the last - with unique surroundings, interesting foes and well developed tactical plans for the NPCs. Running combat in role-playing games will be the theme of my next *How To* article.

Adventures which rely on problem solving are much trickier. Pacing isn't as important in these adventures as the player's enjoyment comes from brainstorming, discussing options and overcoming the challenges you have set them. If you aren't good at puzzles then it is very hard to come up with challenging riddles yourself. It is possible to lift ideas from other sources but you have to be careful that players haven't heard them before. I doubt very much that most experienced players won't know the riddle of the sphinx and its answer.

Another way to satisfy players wanting a problem solving adventure is to provide one heavy on obstacles such as traps, secret doors and tricks. The major problem with these is that they can often be overcome too easily through magic or by player characters with phenomenal abilities. Another problem is that a solution that seems very straight forward to you (since you designed it) will often prove to be too obscure for your players. This leads to frustration on their part and reduced enjoyment. In this situation, either be prepared to offer hints, or to allow a player's plausible (although incorrect) solution to work.

Of course the other end of the scale may be that your players waltz through your most cunning conundrums without batting an eyelid. In this case kill them, they're too smart for their own good! Actually, the answer is either to throw in distractions - meaningless riddles, red herrings etc. - or beef things up a bit. I have found that introducing a problem or obstacle to which I haven't got a solution is a good way to do this. This allows your players to come up with the solution for you but only after they have exhausted all the most obvious avenues they can think of. You may consider this a pretty low thing to do but you may be surprised how much enjoyment it gives you. If nothing else it will at least make the adventure more challenging.

Hooks and Leads

When planning your adventures try to bear in mind others that you may have in your notebook, especially those that may be suitable for follow-up adventures. By doing this you can plant subtle clues and hints about upcoming adventures in the current one. This may be as blatant as a treasure map found as part of a hoard or as subtle as a piece of seemingly trivial information given by an NPC which can be used later as a tie in. When the information finally assumes its true significance, the players will feel pleased with themselves that they've managed to remember something important, and even better, they'll be more inclined to listen to your NPCs in future. In fact, if you do not use this technique you really are asking for trouble. If players know that it doesn't matter what they accept or reject in the descriptions, comments, clues and objects you dress your campaign with they won't bother exploring them any more.

In addition, if you can plant multiple hooks in an adventure then you'll find your players will often choose between them, allowing them to feel more in control of their destinies. In many cases, as mentioned above, they'll add a twist to your planted hook that will set your imagination afire and before you know it the whole exceeds the sum of the parts.

The one real problem with this that I have found is a bizarre "Murphy's Law" effect. If I have planted five new adventure hooks and prepared four, my players will always (and I mean always) choose to follow up the one that I haven't fully prepared. By all means design adventures in advance, but be aware that you may not be able to use them straight away and may have to modify them to meet the current abilities of your players' characters when they finally get to the adventure.

This effect can be avoided by finishing off the "official" part of a gaming session and then allowing the players to talk about or plan what they are going to do at the next session. A few minutes spent listening to them may give you some idea of their intentions. Otherwise you could just ask them straight out what they intend to do. Either way you can then focus your efforts in this one direction.

Get On To It...

This article has attempted to give you some hints on how to create your own adventures, but really I have merely shown you the tip of the iceberg. There are so many ways to go about this intensely creative and personal process that often it is best to get on with the job and see what works best for you. Start small and work towards larger projects as you become more confident with your abilities. The best advice I could give you is, *have a go*.

There is perhaps no greater achievement for a referee than to take your players through a thoroughly exciting campaign that has been all your own work. I find that I enjoy running my own material much more than someone else's. So go ahead. Rise to the challenge. Do It Yourself. ■

A Word With Elminster

Australian Realms Talks To Ed Greenwood

Ed Greenwood visited the east coast of Australia in June/July this year. As the creator of the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting (purchased by TSR to become their setting for the Second Edition of the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* game), Ed would have to be one of the better known names in role-playing to have come to Australia in recent times. Our assistant editor, Lee Sheppard, had the pleasure of talking to Ed at some length. Lee reports that he found Ed to be a genuinely friendly, obliging and above all, interesting man to talk to.

Special thanks must go to Wes Nicholson, of the South Pacific branch of the Role Playing Gamers Association (RPGA) for arranging this interview.

Please tell us a little about yourself...

I'm a 6'3" tall hirsute and overweight white male who was born in 1959 in a suburb of Toronto, in the province of Ontario, in Canada. I've always been an avid fantasy and science fiction reader, and went through school as a stereotypical tall, thin, English/arts-type intellectual prodigy, graduating with a lofty average despite spending my time reading, writing and dreaming. I then earned a Bachelor of Applied Arts degree in journalism from Ryerson University (in Toronto; class of 1981) and was asked if I'd like to work full-time at the library where I'd been shelving books (as a "page" or student worker) since the age of 14. I'm still with the North York Public Library 20 years later - because I love books, storytelling, and finding out interesting stuff while helping people find the information they need.

I have a cottage which I never have time to enjoy, and live in a farmhouse about a hundred miles east of the city where I work - so my time is spent working, driving (I commute both ways between home and work, five days a week), and sitting at the computer writing (4 or 5 books and 70 to a 100 columns and articles a year), with a few moments stolen here and there for appearing at conventions, eating, sleeping, and the minimum necessary housework.

How did the *Forgotten Realms* come to be?

The Realms began as a setting for fantasy stories that I was writing at about age six or seven, because I've always admired Dunsany, early Lovecraft (that is, when he was writing like Dunsany, about the Dreamlands), Vance, Lieber, and other fantasy writers who revel a little bit of detail in each story about a setting all their stories share. I set about doing the same thing, and the Realms started to take shape - initially just as the Sword Coast (that is, Waterdeep with a few coastal neighbouring communities and an unexplored inland northern wilderness), plus a collection of neat-sounding exotic places where merchants who looked like such-and-such sailed from, arriving in Waterdeep to trade these things for those things.

The heart of the Realms was a sort of Sherwood Forest, lovely deep woods, where knights in full plate armour rode along winding roads through small dalelands carving each other - and outlaws, and evil mages - up into little pieces. For movie fans, the movie *Excalibur* (which admittedly came along later) does a fairly good job of capturing the mood I was after.

The counterpoint to that was a freebooting pirate/merchant trader existence I envisaged, of the shippers playing the Sword Coast; Conan-like stories only with a fat, wheezing Falstaff character as the "hero" (Mirt the Moneylender, one of the not-so-secret Lords of Waterdeep). As Roger Zelazny's *Amber* series began to appear, I saw the horizons of wider worlds need not always be "gate" hidden in ancient stone ruins, and broadened my writings accordingly.

Around 1975, I latched onto the fledgling *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) rulebooks, liked the idea but not the lack of some crucial rules, and resolved to keep an eye out for later editions of the game, if any came to be. I went merrily on writing about the Realms, treating it always as a real place, where people did things for discernible reasons, trade routes made sense, and so on. With the release of the *Monster Manual*, I sat up and took notice - someone had actually quantified monsters, so you could tell which was tougher, and how! Great! - and when Jack Vance's concept of "your mind can only hold so many spells, and when you cast 'em, you forget 'em" was developed in the *Player's Handbook*, I was hooked! Immediately, the Realms was twisted to fit *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* (AD&D) terms and rules, and play began (in 1978).

Initially, adventures centred on the Company of Crazy Adventurers, a large company of PCs run by Victor Selby, Ken Woods, and Tim Turner, as they delved into Undermountain (and a so-far unpublished offshoot, *The Dungeon of the Crypt*; yes it's under Waterdeep's City of the Dead) and got led astray in the murky regions of Waterdeep by various manipulative nobles and worse folk. I later ran a number of mini-campaigns as library programs; the first and greatest of these began in Eveningstar in Cormyr, wherein the PCs whom Realms fans know as The Knights of Myth Drannor began their careers exploring the Haunted Halls, and then moved on to Shadowdale. All of the detail you're used to seeing in the Realms was the result of my trying to make the Realms realistic as my regular players (Ian and John Hunter, Victor, Andrew Dewar, Jim Clark, Anita Buttemar, and my wife Jenny) plunged into in-depth roleplaying, and explored every nook and cranny of politics, history, character motivations, trade and so on.

At the same time, I was emptying my creative juices into articles for *Dragon Magazine* (starting with issue #30, "The Curse") that grew out of my need to develop new monsters, new magic, and soon faster than my players could memorise everything

thing in the rulebooks. Folk (notably Jeff Grubb of TSR) noticed the Realms lore I was sneaking into these articles (especially into the Pages From the Mages series), and called me up to ask if I had a detailed campaign world up my sleeve, or if I made it all up as I went along. Well, both those things were true, but TSR wanted to buy a broad-based fantasy campaign world as the setting for the 2nd Edition of AD&D, so they bought the Realms from me - and from the summer of 1986 on, I fired Realms lore at them as fast as I could type... and that's how Realms got started.

How much control do you have over what happens in the published version of the *Forgotten Realms*? Do other writers, or TSR refer their work to you for your blessing or comments?

I have no direct control over what happens in the published Realms - either what products appear, or what's in them. I do try to influence things by proposing products by the truckload, and begging to write as many of them as they'll allow me to do. Certain things in the published Realms (such as what actually happened during what I call the Time of Troubles, also known as "the Avatar series" or The Godswar) I don't care for or wouldn't have done the way other hands did them. but on the other hand, the surprises I get when I read Realms products are often a delight to me (the one thing my own world could never do for me was surprise me, as long as I was creating it all). Many writers, both inside TSR and freelancers hired by TSR, phone me for comments or guidance or brainstorming sessions, or even send manuscripts my way for suggestions/ additions/corrections - and I love them for it.

As long as folks in TSR like Jeff Grubb, Karen Boomgarden, Julia Martin, Steve Schend, and Bruce Heard care about continuity and making the Realms seem real by involving me in what's going on as much as possible, I'll try to pour my heart and soul into making the Realms hang together. I am a freelancer... just like any of you out there who want to write books, modules, or articles for TSR will be, if you actually send stuff in and get it published. I'm not an employee of TSR, and I don't secretly control the Realms (Elminster does... just joking).

Do you still role play?

I love to DM but tend to get over-anxious as a player... and my original Realms players are scattered across the world (in Japan, and at Duke University in the southern United States, for example, professors, both those guys) so Realmsplay sessions involve plane trips, not just rolling up to my place once or twice a week to devour green tea, potato chips and dip (the way it used to be). I'm often asked to run Realms sessions at conventions, and I get most my playing that way, these days.

You would have to be recognised as one of the more successful writers in the role playing industry and yet I understand you still have a "real" job. Does writing really pay that poorly?

Writing in general has always paid poorly in relation to some other jobs... but I can't complain; I'm getting paid for doing something I love! Unfortunately, the tax people in Canada have noticed that, so they take a fair amount of whatever I manage to hang onto after I've paid for all the gas, car repairs, and new cars that my daily commuting forces me to buy! I also buy thousands of books and a fair number of CDs and videos in a year... its astonishing how easy spending money gets to be. Publishers also pay "in the future"... and when you buy food, you have to pay in money you have right now - hence the "real job". I love doing the library work, too... so why stop?

You have also tried your hand at writing novels. How does that experience compare with writing purely gaming material? Tell us about the new novel.

Writing novels is fun... and in some ways easier than writing gaming material. Novels give a writer space to develop stuff that short stories don't allow - and in my case, give a me chance to bring important events in Realms history to life, in front of readers' eyes. I've always written little "short short" vignettes for myself, that capture the essential character of an important person, and although in my Realms novels I can't explore the full complexities that I'd like to (left to myself, my prose would tend more towards the style of, say, Guy Gavriel Kay), I revel in the chance to lay out some of the life of the Realms in print.

As a reader, I've always disliked fantasy trilogies that seemed pre-planned and packaged as a series, so when I did Spellfire, I wanted to do a story that was complete in itself. A comedy of errors unfolded, and for various reasons almost a third of that novel was cut - leaving Shandril's story hanging. When TSR's book department offered me a chance to do another Shandril novel, I pounced on it, and this spring Crown of Fire appeared. I'm pleased with it, but since I finished it, I've done a Manshoon short story for the upcoming anthology Realms of Infamy (a sequel of sorts to Realms of Valor, only this time the villains get to strut their stuff), and I'm already putting the finishing touches to a hardcover novel that you should see this December (or around then). It's called Elminster: The Making Of A Mage, and I think it's better than anything I've done so far. I look forward to doing many more novels in the future, and I'd like to hear from all Realms fans about what they like and what they hate about what I've done thus far. I'd like to do more Elminster novels and I'd like to delve deep into the adventures of Mirt (and his sidekick Asper), the Knights of Narm and Rathan, and the decadent intrigues of the nobles of Waterdeep... but only time will tell what I can find time to write.

Crown of Fire picks up right after the end of Spellfire, following Shandril's career as the Zhentarim again try to capture her. We don't see much of Elminster or the Knights of Myth Drannor; this is Shandril's book (although Mirt is introduced to Realms readers). The upcoming Elminster novel goes back a thousand years (or so) in Realms history, to look at Elminster as a youth in the now-vanished kingdom of Athalantar (present-day Secomber stands on the site of its capital, Hastarl), and the events that made him into a wizard - and more!

Where do you see the hobby of role playing going in the future? Do you think the 'traditional' round a table game is going to be able to successfully compete with computer 'role playing' games, on-line gaming, live role playing and other multi-media entertainments?

Roleplaying is always growing and changing, but just as I don't think books will ever disappear (for a person with eyesight to enjoy one, they don't need electricity or an expensive computer, and avoid all format/software/compatibility hassles), I don't think the traditional sitting-around-a-table game will ever disappear. There isn't a computer program yet (and may never be) that can match the high-speed judgments and descriptive commentary (or ham acting, if you prefer) of a DM... and people will always enjoy roleplaying games as a chance to be with their friends, face-to-face, their excitement (or mirth) building on each other's reactions. Other forms of gaming can never replace that. They can offer alternatives, especially as players grow older, and demands on their time (and the difficulties of assembling a group



TAN '94

CULTIES

"Avaunt thyself, foul spawn of Beelezebub!"

**"It is the Will of The Lord!
Only a heretic would ask questions!"**

"No problem, I'm a qualified exorcist."

You're a Cultie, a fanatical member of one of the thousands of religious splinter groups that exist throughout the 2027 world. Mind you, your cult is the only sect that is truly enlightened with the divine blessings of God. All the other religious groups that exist are merely frauds, heretics and loonies! The fact that they say exactly the same things about your cult simply proves how deranged the other religious sects really are! Since the days of the Collapse, you and your extended cult family have dwelt in the sect's fortified temple compound and contemplated the teachings of God. You are fanatically loyal to the cult and its leader, to the point at which you would lay down your life for the sake of the sect. Sometimes you launch raids from the compound to attack other (sadly misinformed) Culties, spread religious propaganda or attempt to enlist new recruits. However, the greatest honour that may be bestowed on a Cultie is to take part in an assault on the Unholiest of Unholies, the Spawn of Satan, Beelezebub incarnate: the ISA!

What You Look Like

As a Cultie, you tend to wear dark, voluminous, monastic-style robes with large hoods and a thick drawstring at the waist. If you are a member of one of the more militant cults, it is highly likely that your robes are actually armoured to a degree! Either large boots or bare feet are likely when it comes to footwear. A large religious symbol is almost always worn around a Cultie's neck, whilst his or her robes tend to also display this symbol.

A lack of personal hygiene is prevalent among many 2027 Culties. You may have even taken a vow not to wash, shave or cut your hair in order to display your devotion to the natural gifts of God - albeit in a rather pungent and bizarre manner! Your dishevelled appearance and tendency towards flagellation tends to encourage rumours regarding the

insanity of Culties. Such rumours are totally untrue... the Lord told you so when he dropped by for a can of Smash and a little chat just the other day(!).

Subculture

You are the proud heirs of the Dominican Monks, the Flagellants of the Apocalypse, David Khoresh and the Flying Nun. As such, you are not only extremely fanatical, pious and dangerous, but you are also extremely confused! The cult has developed a theology based on a mish-mash of religious beliefs from throughout the ages, all mixed up with a large dose of occult superstition, and then taken more literally than it was originally intended! What is more, you are totally convinced that this theology, as espoused by the infallible cult leader, is entirely correct and should be believed without question. After all, only heretics ask questions! You have been taught what is right ("brainwashing" is an ugly word!) by the cult leader and your parents since your birth, and to question this teaching is almost unthinkable.

And speaking of parents, you are one of the few Yogangers who actually have them! In fact, the cult compound environment and its strong emphasis on family unity and values has succeeded in creating a loving and stable (if highly deranged and misinformed) extended family where the ISA and the Megacorps failed. You know all the members of your cult intimately and regard them all as true family members.

Unfortunately, this form of strong and united religious family tends to be incredibly extreme in its views and encourages all manner of fanatics, racists and psychos into its ranks! The Cultie's intolerance of those who share opposing views to their own is near-legendary, as is the ruthlessness of their actions against such dissenters. Ritual exorcisms and curses, propaganda wars, excommunication and concentrated automatic weapons fire are all utilised in resolving "little theological disagreements" with the Culties' rivals!

Belonging

Most Culties become members of a sect by default. That is, when your parents became members of a religious group, they brought along their children who were also inducted into the sect. Most of these children didn't mind becoming Culties. After all, at least they actually have parents, let alone the fact that they aren't corporate lackeys! In addition, the sect provides young Culties with a sense of discipline, education, love and friends. Unfortunately, as they joined the cult at a very young age, such children are very prone to religious brainwashing and fanaticism.

There are also some Culties who join religious groups of their own volition. These individuals must demonstrate that they are ideologically compatible with the cult's theology, as well as being loyal to its rules and members. When a prospective Cultie's devotion is called into question, he or

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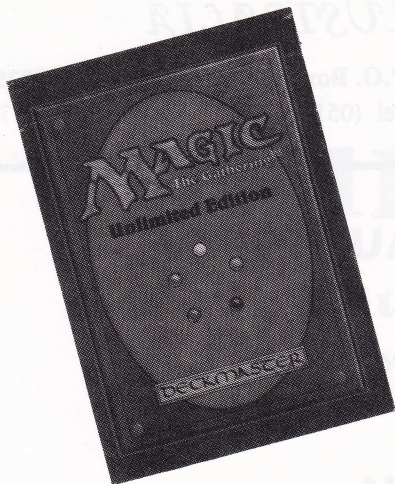
*Ash nazg durbatuluk, ash nazg gimbatul,
ash nazg thrakatuluk, agh burzum-ishi krimpatul.*

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.

- The Fellowship of the Ring, p. 81

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BATTLE of the CARDS

Head to Head Review by Mike Trace



The release of TSR, Inc's SPELLFIRE trading card game was one I was looking forward to because I was very interested to see how it was going to present itself as a competitor to the hugely successful and highly acclaimed Magic:The Gathering (MTG) game from Wizards of the Coast (WoC) and Garfield games. SPELLFIRE was released in a very short time frame, from concept to production, to address the inroads that MTG was having on the fantasy market, specifically TSR's market share; how does it fare?

Overview

SPELLFIRE is designed for two or more players, the aim is to be the first player to place down on the table six "realms" (these are basically major land or city areas represented by a playing card). To defend these realms and attack and destroy opponent realms players have the rest of their deck, these include holdings which are placed with a realm and help defend it by giving the land special defence abilities. Champion cards are available to either attack or defend; these can be either in the form of a hero, wizard, cleric or monster, each having a combat ability and often an additional special ability. The wizards and clerics are normally the only character cards that can cast any of the many spells cards which are available in a player's deck. There are four other types of cards; magical items and artifacts cards both give champions, and sometimes realms, special abilities or combat modifiers; ally cards add to the combat bonus of a battle for both the defender or the attacker and are then discarded; and finally, event cards which influence both sides and can be played at any time - acts of god!

Magic:The Gathering is also a card game for two or more players which is based on the idea of a duel between wizards, each with twenty life points, fighting for supremacy. Again both players can cast spells to summon allies, monsters, fighters and animals to help each either defend their own life points or attack the opponent's. Each time the opponent is damaged by an attack from a creature or a spell, life points are removed from the attacked player. First wizard down to zero loses the game and, if the players were playing for ante (which is purely optional), forfeits the ante card to the victor. The most important cards in MTG are the land cards, these generate the mana or power which the players need to spend in order to summon up creatures and cast spells. Artifact cards confer special abilities, to the player or summoned creatures.

Game Play

To start playing SPELLFIRE you need to construct a deck from the cards you have traded and bought, each deck can be of any size but cannot contain more than 15 realms and 20 champions, although which cards you use is up to you. If you use too many cards when constructing your deck you reduce the probability of your champions and realms coming out, effectively diluting the deck. Realms cards are the most important, you need six unrazed realms out in play to win. Unfortunately your opponent is always attacking and every time you lose a battle he gets to raze (turn over) a realm. Play commences after shuffling your deck then drawing five cards; then play alternates, each player taking turns to lay out realms (one per turn), play champions, magical artifacts or items and casting spells. Only wizards and clerics can cast spells, although some special attributes detailed on the cards allows you to cast spells either as a hero, monster or even as a realm. One of the restrictions of the game is that clerics can only cast cleric spells and wizards only the wizard spells - any hero with a special dual spell ability is a definite asset to your deck.

The rule book is included with the starter deck and is well laid out, games are quick, lasting about 30 to 45 minutes. Combat is relatively simple, being won by the champion with the largest combat modifier after the casting of all spells, allocation of allies and adding any realm or holding bonuses. The one area of confusion is during the attacking/defending phase, with spells having an indicator as to when they may be cast, either in defence (Def 3/4) or offence (Off/4), some of these cards simply can't be played as indicated. Additionally, some of the magical artifacts really unbalance the game, and when you come down to it, why would you every include the many +1, +2, and +3 allies when you can have +4 and +5 allies for no extra cost. The same goes for a lot of the weaker spells, you would never use them. A nice touch to SPELLFIRE is that you get to draw three cards a turn instead of one in MTG, this gives you an increased chance of getting and playing your more important cards, a good balancer.

Magic:The Gathering also requires that you construct a deck from the cards you've collected, the size of the deck is up to you but you need a minimum of 60, whilst 80 seems to play well. If your deck is too large (over 100) most cards wont get to be played

and some of your better more powerful cards seem to end up on the bottom of the deck. Most players tend to use two colours in their deck construction, single colour decks are more easily defeated and multi colour decks have great difficulty getting their lands and thus mana out, confused read on!

The MTG game has five land types which correspond to the colours of the power of the wizard, these are; swamps which generate black mana, the black deck tends to be full of undead, evil creatures and spells. Plains generate white mana which tends to goodness, with angels, knights, "nice" creatures and lots of circles of protection, wards and healing spells; mountains generate red mana with their creatures are ogres, goblins and dragons, while red spells tend to be offensive with lightning bolts disintegrates and flash fires; forests generate green mana with lots of creatures that live in the forest, spells include lots of growth spells, with streams of life, regrowths and regeneration, a popular colour; finally islands generate blue mana which naturally makes use of water creatures and elementals, the spells are some of the best with counterspells, control magic, elemental blasts and power sinks.

MTG games are relatively quick 15 - 30 minutes, with each player shuffling his deck, cutting and removing an ante card (whether playing for ante or not this rule can often disable a pack by removing the players favourite megadeath card!), dealing seven cards each and then alternating playing out their hands, placing out land (one per turn), summoning creatures casting spells and attacking and defending each other until one player's life points total drops to zero. The rules booklet included in the Starter set is clear and only takes 15 minutes to read, additional instructions are clearly marked on each of the cards and are implemented when played or at the casting player's choice. The only difficulty most people have with the game is the system of "instants" and "interrupts" which are spells which stop or interfere with previously cast spells - sometimes the sequencing of these cards and their effects become confusing. Additional guidance to rules can be found from the WoC Pocket Players Guide and yes there is now a 24 hour e-mail rules help service questions@wizards.com.

Production Quality

SPELLFIRE's cards are a disappointment. From what I have seen to date there is very little new art work used; nearly all the art has been lifted from TSR's vast product catalogue, some if it appearing for the third or fourth time. In fact, even the way this has been done is fairly poor as most of the illustrations on the cards are a segment cut from of an existing, significantly larger piece of art with no care taken to isolate the focus image. What you end up with is bits of other characters, backgrounds, swords and weapons in the card creating a jigsaw effect. The only bit of fun here, is looking through your own AD&D library to spot where your cards have been lifted from. I suspect that this rough cut and paste job was the result of a production expedient, the need to get the game out into the marketplace ASAP. Also the stock for the cards is too light, my weeks-old deck is starting to show significant signs of wear, especially at the edges. I may have to stop playing with them soon just to save the cards!

MTG cards are of a higher standard, as the art is nearly all newly commissioned, specifically designed for the card itself. There is some variance in the quality of some of the art but that tends to be artist specific and often down to personal preference. I have a strong dislike for some of the cartoonish work, whereas some of the acrylics are excellent, especially in the DARK release.

Collectability

SPELLFIRE's collectability is, I believe, limited, mainly because of the second-hand art work; in fact some cards within the set are duplicated - Card 235 "Kaliday" features exactly the same art as card 242 the "Lost Oasis". As an aside, I have recently seen some of Larry Elmore's trading cards, these are fantastic and in direct contrast to the SPELLFIRE cards.

MTG is a very collectible card issue. Because of the quality, originality, and rarity of some key cards they are very popular with collectors and players alike. With WoC continuing to release limited print runs of their expansions this will ensure that each set will be well sought after.

How Much To Play?

The current cost to get started with SPELLFIRE is \$19.95 (Australian) per two-deck pack of 110 cards with 15 card booster packs being \$5.95, to be competitive you will need at least one starter pack and about 10 plus boosters. MTG's cost is \$17.50 to \$17.95 for the starter decks of sixty cards with a 15 card booster pack selling for \$5.95. The 8 card expansion sets like the DARK are selling for between \$3.50 and \$3.95. Again you need at least one starter decks and a minimum of twenty booster packs to be competitive with other player's decks. Obviously if you are a collector, whichever game, the cost of purchasing every available is going to be excessive, especially if you don't get much of an opportunity to trade with other players and have to rely on purchasing boosters to complete your sets.

Future Expansions

SPELLFIRE planned future releases are two 110 card booster sets, both set in AD&D realms - the first in RAVENLOFT, the second, DRAGONLANCE. Expect your favourite cities, artifacts and characters from these realms to make an appearance. MTG has just released its fourth expansion, THE DARK; this is an 119 card set, released as a booster series, eight cards per pack. This, like the previously released LEGENDS, ANTIQUITIES, and ARABIAN NIGHTS is selling very fast, with the usual limited print runs it is being pre-sold and snapped up by players and collectors alike. The next release for MTG is FALLEN EMPIRES, again another 119 cards in booster expansions due October. JYHAD produced by Garfield Games is another Deckmaster game like MTG, but is not compatible with the current MTG deck, being set in a modern Gothic Punk era as per the Vampire rpg. It is available in Australia now in limited quantities.

Recommendations

Which one to buy? Without any doubt or hesitation Magic:The Gathering would be the card game system I would recommend you purchase to play or collect. Sure, if you enjoy the TSR products you will enjoy flicking through your deck to see your favourite character or realm, and for that quick and simple fireside game then SPELLFIRE will be for you. But with Magic:The Gathering you can walk into just about any gaming store, club meet, or convention with your MTG deck in your left pocket, your tradables in the right and you'll enter a good trading session and a great game. SPELLFIRE - 4 out of 10. MTG - 9.5 out of 10. ■

TACTICS

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Games Designers Workshop's monthly mag' is the definitive publication for Sci-Fi roleplayers. Every GDW system is covered; 2300AD, Megatraveller, Twilight 2000, Space 1889 & Dark Conspiracy. Other games such as Warhammer 40K, Battletech, Cyberpunk et al, are also covered (through not as profusely as the former titles). Article definition involves RPG adventures, wargame scenarios, variant rules, new equipment, and general gaming essays. Publication regularity is very good.

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DRAGON

TSR's popular monthly magazine. The emphasis is on AD&D with a veritable treasure chest of articles, adventures & ads(!) for Forgotten Realms, Dark Sun etc. Features on Top Secret SI & Marvel Supers are tolerated, albeit with less proliferation. Every issue includes such things as new spells, magic items, strange monsters, variant NPC classes, short stories, comics, game reviews, and a broad selection of essays on gaming techniques & campaigns. Publication regularity is excellent.

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GENERAL

Avalon Hill's great publication that deals exclusively with Avalon Hill simulations (what a surprise!). Each issue highlights a specific (usually new) product, with extensive feature articles. However a selection of popular games (such as ASL, Third Reich, Diplomacy etc) are also regularly covered in detail. Article definition includes series replays scenarios, designer's notes, strategy & tactics, optional rules, coming attractions & (infrequently) variant counters. Good publication regularity.

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PYRAMID

Steve Jackson's new bi-monthly role playing magazine. It is 72 pages in length, and features reports on overseas cons, reviews hot selling games, such as Earthdawn, contains scenarios and designer's notes on things such as GURPS, Car Wars, Toon, etc. It also has many regular features such as Steve Jackson's games news and release schedule, industry news, AADA news, etc. It also contains some rather tongue in cheek rip offs of other games. For example, they are running a series of Toon supplements, such as: Hampshire: The Masked Ace Raid, and coming is Werewolf: Ah, Pork Lips, Gee, which games are they ripping off?

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A professional American fanzine-style B4 digest of arcane lore for the Call of Cthulhu keeper, player & enthusiast. Articles include the standard selection of scenarios, campaign details, new Lovecraftian (?) beasts, background source material, and the other related miscellany. Everyone who enjoys chaosium's superb horror RPG would be well advised to invest in this magazine. Quality material by known english and Australian authors are regularly included. Publication regularity is slow. Back issues available are: 5 and 3, the double issue 8/9.

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A glossy, monthly English magazine solely dedicated to Games Workshop products. Enthusiasts of Warhammer RPG, Warhammer Fantasy Battles, Warhammer 40K, Space Hulk, Space Marine, and all the rest, will find this invaluable. Articles cover adventures, scenarios, new rules, variant counters, backgrounds, and the like. Every issue contains photographs & specifications for new Citadel releases, plus colour pages highlighting superb miniatures painting! Publication regularity is very good.

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WHITE WOLF

A bi-monthly role playing magazine published by White Wolf. It features a mix of articles, scenarios, and regular columns and heaps of reviews. Although published by White Wolf it has an independant outlook, and recent games featured ShadowRun, TORG, Vampire, Cyberpunk, Ars Magica, Werewolf, Pendragon, Call of Cthulhu, etc. It includes both colour and black and white pages, and space is given to PBMs, and regular features on artists and their superb works. 80 pages. A percentage of the proceeds are sent on to sponsor a real life wolf pack.

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Ha! Thought I'd gone for good, didn't you!

I've been dwelling for some time in cyberspace and can say that it is not better than sex (not many things are). I'm speaking of course of the internet, that deliciously free (as in unrestricted, its not cheap to get access) and unrestrained dimension of information that journalists and politicians like to call the information highway (and we know how knowledgeable those folks are, right?). Teleport this instant to your nearest hardware dispensary and purchase computer and modem. You will not be sorry; though the other people in your life may think you a victim of foul play - leave a message with those you love, "If I'm not back in 12 hours, for the love of god please switch off the power - or at least tape *Star Trek: The Next Generation* for me."

Downloading goodies via the internet can be a frustrating and SLOW process (especially big goodies). For those of you without a modem, or without access via work or uni, all is not lost. Lots of goodies are available on CD-ROM at any half-decent computer store. Yeah, I know you've got to have a CD-ROM drive, but hey you're not going to admit non-ownership in public are you? WHAT? No Double-spin, multi-session, Photo-CD compatible CD-ROM drive on your P.C.? LOSER!

So. Platter Number One: *The Night Of The Living Dead*, (Chestnut Classic Video CD-ROMs \$39.95) is playing in a window in the corner of my screen as I type this; which is probably why I'm not making a hell of a lot of sense. Sure, at any reasonable screen resolution it's a small window, its black & white, its a little jerky, and the lipsynch is laughable; but it works. I wouldn't want to watch "Silence of the Lambs" this way but for this old horror clunker its perfect. Imagine "2001" in a box about ten centimetres on a side, or "Gone with The Wind" - nope the technology's got to improve before its anything but a toy, but its a fun little toy. And those shambling undead are horrifying; they look uncannily like some of my relatives. "Godzilla Vs Megalon" is also available, so are "The Three Stooges" and some early animated junk like Betty Boop, Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig.. *TNOTLD* is great fun (god those people could act!), perfect viewing while waiting for those huge files to download. Sorry I forgot, you don't have a modem! One more thing; don't forget to turn off the screen blander, I did!

Platter Number Two: *Hugo and Nebula Anthology 1993* (\$39.95, ClariNet Communications Corp., edited by Brad Templeton). This is an electronic book, of sorts, and as such raises all sorts of questions about the validity of this form of literary presentation. There's no doubt you can squeeze a lot of words onto one o' these here plastic thingummies. But do you really want to sit in front of your P.C. screen for the number of hours required to read them words? I don't think I could hack it! I practically live here as is, add reading time and I might as well start on the chemotherapy right now, my cerebral cortex'll be Carcinoma city.

The Analytical Engine

BOOK REVIEWS

By Peter Crank

Add to that the impracticality of dragging the P.C. out in front of the fire on a cold night, or taking it on the bus or on holiday, all so I can read a book. Yes, I know I could buy a laptop or notebook computer but I could also buy a lot of plain paper books with that money. (Actually my favourite reading position involves a large trampoline, a bright sunny day and a nice cuppa tea, try that with any kind of P.C.!). So it falls into the same category as *TNOTLD*, an amusing diversion, or a handy way to read a good story while you should be working on that assignment. Paper books are here to stay; until someone invents something as user-friendly, as portable, and as capable of withstanding three months spreadeagled face-down on my bedside table under a mountain of New Scientists and old pizza boxes.

For the record the disk contains: *China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen McHugh, *Red Mars* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *Steel Beach* by John Varley, *Doomsday Book* by Connie Willis and a special version of *A Fire Upon the Deep* by Vernor Vinge ('special' meaning 500K of hypertext linked notes by the author - of interest only to the truly fanatical. I love the book but the notes bored me to television). You want more? There's more! All the Hugo & Nebula nominated short fiction for 1993, examples of the work of the Fan nominees (riveting - no not entirely fair, Dave Langford is brilliant, the rest are pedestrian -well no more like road kill). The samples of fan art really suck (the usual poorly drawn elves and dragons). The professional art though! The artwork for *Aristoi* by Jim Burns (novel by Walter John Williams) is fabulous, darling, and can easily be converted to bitmap for inclusion as MS Windows wallpaper. Not that I would do such a thing. (Looks great on the 15 inch monitor.)

The Campbell Award nominees are there too (so many bloody awards - and they give them all to the same bloody people! It has

become as meaningless as the OSCARS), as well as info on the various awards and heaps of really bad jokes downloaded via internet; some so distasteful and shocking I immediately picked up the phone to tell my friends.

I like this disk, despite my reservations, because of the classy way its been put together. I'm not so keen on the author videos included with some of the stories - I think you're better off never meeting these people, it can be a shattering experience. The average SF or Fantasy author usually over-fulfils the stereotypical image of same. Why do they all have beards? And haven't any of them ever heard of exercise? And ugly... well I digress. There is a big mess of stuff on SF generally, including SF TV show listings, which immediately caught my big square eyes. Buy this one its worth it; your eyes will burn out though, don't say I didn't warn you!

Platter Number Three: *Sci-Fi/Fantasy* (\$29.95) This is a bit of a grab bag. It claims 1200+ VGA photos and over 100 sound files. I haven't counted them but it sounds fair. The photos (all gifs) vary from great to bloody stupid. You get promotional stills for movies like *T2*, shows like *Doctor Who* (Ho hum), *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine* and *V* (remember that turkey!). There are sound files from *Star Trek* and *The Next Generation* and *Lost in Space* (Warning! Warning!) and my personal favourite "Open the pod bay doors HAL" (all in .wav format). The best of the artwork includes a huge collection of stuff from Boris (guaranteed to piss-off the politically correct) and some *D&D* and *Dragonlance* stuff. My judgement? Worth the price tag, especially if you like lots of pictures of women in brass bras.

There is something terribly compelling, maybe even addictive, about the information displayed on your P.C.'s monitor. Time flashes by. Before you can gibber, "I'm going to sleep in and miss my train!", its bloody 4:00 AM, your bum hurts from sitting on your decidedly unergonomic chair and people all over the house are tossing restlessly in their sleep as your soundcard blasts out (probably for the five hundredth time that night) , "THAT DOES NOT COMPUTE!"; and the later it gets, the funnier you find that. Finally, eyes watering, cerebellum sizzling from the six cans of Jolt Cola you drained, stomach outgassing the byproducts of the incomplete digestion of two packets of Chef's Choice CC's, you stumble to bed, too knackered to even think about brushing your teeth. Are you satisfied? Have you learned something? Don't know, but you'll be there the next night all the same. "UUurrrRRRRPPPP!" Pardon me!

Real books, but not many, blame cyberspace. Did Gibson actually invent that word? I can't remember if he did. I know his publicists make outrageous claims about him being the Father of Virtual Reality. Anyone who knows the field knows that VR was born when Gibson was a pup. Let me know, my mind's a blank on this one and I won't have time to hunt it up. O.K. A recent import and now also available in a British Rights edition is *The Harvest* by Robert Charles

Wilson. (Bantam/Spectra \$12.95). Robert is a very capable author with some really solid work listed in the old C.V. - *Memory Wire* is one that springs to mind, from way back in '87. It featured a cyberpunkish scenario, tortured hero, evil/corrupt government/big business, drugs, tortured heroine, buckets of blood; you get the idea. With *The Harvest* Wilson is treading on Greg Bear's turf (but with better characterisation). Bear's people tend to get a bit lost amongst the very large stage props he uses - exploding planets, moon sized starships, hypertubes from infinity, that sort of thing. Its a bit like doing a still life with a zeppelin and a grape; hard to reconcile the scales. Actually Bear seems to me a reincarnation of E. E. 'doc' Smith - and I mean that in the nicest possible way, Bear's farout physics has some theoretical basis, 'doc' Smith just made it up as he went along. I guess what I'm trying to say is that Mr Wilson get the scale right. He deals with an apocalyptic planet changing event from the human angle and doesn't let the props steal the show. If you want a point of reference compare *The Harvest* to Clarke's *Childhood's End*; they share the same humanistic viewpoint, the same sad grandeur.

The story in a nutshell: Aliens show up and offer us an immortality of sorts, all humanity accepts - barring one in ten thousand who gather together to face an uncertain future etc. The story follows our tortured hero as he comes to terms with his decision to stay; as he tries to deal with the loss of those that are moving on to a new existence, in a virtual environment free of physical ties. Would you accept? Would I Hell yes! But what if my closest loved ones refused the gift? But this book's value lies in its ability to make you stop and consider. Does the loss of mortality imply a loss of humanity, and does that matter even if it does. Good stuff, this is what SF is supposed to be; buy it and answer the questions yourself.

Australian Made. *Alien Shores*, edited by Peter McNamara & Margaret Winch (Aphelion \$19.95). A ripsnorter of an Aussie Anthology. Hats off to Aphelion! A lot of the usual names in here, but then it is a small pond, as I've said before. Support this product. Its a damn good read (mostly, but then anthologies are like that). *The Quiet Redemption of Andy the House* by Terry Dowling is my pick of the bunch.

If you ever wondered where I get the material I review; wonder no more. Some comes to us from the various publishers and distributors, with a embargo date so we don't jump the gun. Getting books for free is nice, but its not my preferred method. A lot of what I cover I purchase myself. Shock! There was a famous drama critic for the New York Times (whose name escapes me) who refused to accept free tickets to review stage shows. She chose instead to go when and where she willed, at her own expense, on her own timetable. That way she could feel free of obligation and provide an unbiased viewpoint. That's the way I work. If I only reviewed the stuff that came by mail to us I would go stark staring mad.

Next time round expect a splash of Horror, a slice of Fantasy and a shot of Militaria. Bon Appetit!

Dice Are Dead

Play-By-Mail Column

Submissions To:

Dice Are Dead
PO BOX 220
Morley
Western Australia
6943

Companies mentioned:

Baron's Australian Midgard
PO Box 542, Lindfield NSW 2070

Dynamic Games
PO Box 707 Dapto, NSW 2530

Mercury Games, PO Box N600,
Grosvenor Plce, Sydney NSW 2000

Opcon Games, 24 Milner Court,
Cranbourne VIC 3977

Roma Games, PO Box 1957,
Toowoomba QLD 4350

SFGA, PO Box 351,
Newborough, VIC 3825

PBM NEWS

Middle Earth By Mail!

Strategic Fantasy Games of Australia (SFGA) have acquired a license from Florida's Games Systems, Inc (GSI) who in turn licensed the highly successful *Middle Earth PBM* from Iron Crown Enterprises, Inc (ICE) the makers of the Middle Earth Role Playing game. Based on the perennially popular Lord of the rings trilogy, here is what Nicky Palmer of Flagship magazine has to say about the game:

"...*Middle Earth PBM* combines a genuine Tolkien 'feel' with a real game challenge. Personally I'm always suspicious of anything with a famous name attached to it, whether it's Kasparov's chess guide or notes for beginning actors by Ronald Reagan. I know a lot of Tolkien fans in the hobby felt just that way when GSI announced *Middle Earth PBM*, and I don't know a single one who hasn't been persuaded that the game reflects a deep knowledge of Tolkien's creation."

Already SFGA have impressed me with their professionalism and the quality of their output - the rule book and turnsheets are produced using state of the art technology. We have a reviewer in the first game and look forward to bringing you his reports. For more information check out SFGA's ad this issue.

The World Beyond

The PBM companies in Australia have combined their inhouse newsletters to form the first edition of a new magazine totally dedicated to Play By Mail games. Roma Games' Peter Catling has compiled the first issue and *The World Beyond* should be out in September. If you are currently in an Australian run PBM game then you should automatically receive a copy. If you don't, or you are not currently in a game, contact your moderator or call Peter on (076) 39 3131.

Dynamic Games Chit Chat

In his own words, here's what's new from Peter Read... "*Continental Rails* and *Feudal Lords* were originally run by Kevin Flynn of Australian Wizard, but he no longer runs PBM games so I was approached by de Graaf Simulations in USA to run them. I wasn't too keen as I have more than enough games, but John de Graaf said they have been extensively upgraded and would appreciate me taking them on. In a moment of weakness I said yes but I'm not sorry as I have played them both. Whilst *Continental Rails* isn't my type of game, there are a lot of players who do enjoy it. Now, *Feudal Lords* is my type - I can attack and kill and destroy and nuke (oops, wrong game - no nukes here!!) other players. My diplomacy is a lump of 4*2 behind the ear!

"Late in July, I was asked by Peter Wheeldon if I would run his game *Bacteria*. Now, this is another game where I am in my element, but it has a twist - strategy is important. This means I have to think a little and that's where the problems occur. Anyhow,

it is a good easy game and I'm having fun playing it. Unfortunately, due to there only being 24 hours in a day I don't have time to get it up and running until November when Continental Rails and Feudal Lords have settled down.

"More on the game scene. We are well underway designing our new game called Peril. Originally designed as a hunting style fantasy game, it has grown out of proportion and there is so much to do, we have had to create a new game type called "Virtual World". It would take too long to describe it and the options available, and it isn't ready for public release so I won't reveal any more except to say West Australians will be the first ones to play it. Yes, Swan Con will be it's official release venue. I'll be over there (or over here if you're over there) over Easter 1995 and expect to have a BALL!

"Allsorts, my latest game is now running well after a very slow start. Players are starting to get into the swing of things (a 50% price discount helped that!). It has also been sold overseas, which is a big bonus. Also a little slow at the moment, possibly due to other games filling quickly, is Balance of Power, my WWII combat game - I still need 8 players although by the time this is published, it may be full."

It is great to see a man enjoy his work as much as Peter does. I guess if you're in a game he is also playing, the lesson is not to engage in diplomacy with him, ouch!

Mithra Ahoy!

James Chao is working on importing a very successful fantasy conquest game from Germany. *Mithra* is basically a very simple build-conquest game, but with some surprises. There is plenty of scope for player alliances and also some magical influence in the game.

James advises: "We'll be plunging in the deep end with no playtest (stable code has run in the other countries for a while now) and are asking for interested players to join in our first game (12 to 18 players a game). DO NOT send cheques, just an expression of interest, and we'll get back to all parties. We'll do a mail out to all respondents ASAP. Write to: James Chao, PO Box 4538, North Rocks, NSW 2151."

Opcon Games

Kevin Smith, based in Victoria, has been running games under license from Roma Games for quite some time. Now he and wife, Melinda are about to launch on their own as Opcon Games; they have the exclusive Australia-wide rights to the popular Warriors & Wizards game. Kevin will still be running Adventurer Kings, Victoria as part of the Roma Games connection. Expect to hear more from this quarter.

The Baron's Aust. Midgard

Nick Horgan tells us with justifiable pride that Midgard now exceeds the 200 player mark. "Players are gaining city positions and generally making life more difficult for those they don't like." For info on this game and Postal American Football contact Nick soon.

FEATURE REVIEW

Trollquest II Mercury Games

Reviewed by Adam East

Mercury Games' fantasy mining PBM, *Trollquest II* tempts us to try to obtain that elusive dream of treasure and power that evokes, for me, memories of my early gaming years. Just as across the table role-playing games have evolved over recent years, so has the original *Trollquest* game changed and improved. The basic game itself is quite similar to the original *Trollquest*, but with improvements that make play more competitive. For those of you who may have missed the review of *Trollquest* in issue 16 the basic set up is as follows.

Up to 16 players each own a clan in a subterranean world. This world consists of 4000 different blocks (a 20 by 20 field over ten levels), with each block containing up to 99 'chunks' of rock and other substances. Blocks with no chunks in them are called caves. It is within these caves that your clan moves and works.

In the original *Trollquest*, the player's aim was to find the fabled Gems of Life, but with *Trollquest II*, the focus changes because as the advertisement tells us, "The fabled Gems of Life have been stolen by adventurers, so the clans are forced into a war of domination of the underworld." Your job, as leader of a clan, now has become to obtain 60% or more of the total money in the game, at which point you're presumed to be strong enough to be able to pulverise the remaining clans with much glee and destruction.

Firstly, you must decide which of the eight races available you want your clan to be. This decision will determine the makeup of professions which your clan members will have. These professions are: Miners to dig rock to gain wealth from minerals and to make more caves; Fighters to destroy other clans or protect your clan from wandering monsters; Sages to divine location and amount of rocks, minerals, enemy clans and so forth around your position; and finally Workers which help to build up Colonies. Colonies are your bases which give added strength to Miners, Fighters and Sages when doing jobs, whilst producing new men each turn to be distributed out to do their thing.

Every race produces men from all four professions, but each race is specialised in some way so that their Colonies produce more of some professions and less of others. Thus your choice of race will determine your strategy in play, based on their strengths and weaknesses. A Troll clan such as mine is great at beating up the neighbours, but not so good at divining surrounding wealth, so I've had to adopt a tactic of blitzkrieging any other clans that I encounter. How sad!

The men in the four professions are assigned into groups to work together, called Units. These Units are given specific orders as to what to do, and this provides the main brain-strain in *Trollquest II*; the question being 'What should I get each Unit to do?' An advantage is that this game allows for more

specific orders than the original version. A good tactic is to try and keep Units to consist mainly of only one profession (and some fighters for defence) as Units can only have one order at any one time.

It is within the gameplay itself, rather than the setup, where the differences in *Trollquest II* are notable. Firstly, minerals, the basis of wealth, are available in much larger proportions. Probably 80% of all the blocks contain minerals of some type, and they're more evenly spread than in version I - no longer is the good stuff ten levels beneath you, it can be just around the corner. Thus the process of accumulating wealth can start straight away. Next, magic items are more plentiful too, either hidden in rocks, or possessed as treasure by wandering monsters. These are useful as they can make you invincible for a turn, increase your production or whatever.

In fact, the easier process of making your Colonies grow is a major factor in *Trollquest II*, ensuring that sooner rather than later you'll be rubbing shoulders with other clans, forcing a fight for living space or wealth. Colonies now automatically grow in size every turn, producing even more men for you to assemble into Units. Additionally, some blocks may contain water or vegetation which will accelerate your colony's growth even further. On the down side there are now dangerous blocks containing poisonous gas or monster lairs which can critically damage Units passing through or colonies set up in such blocks.

The main factor in *Trollquest II* is the competition. Game statistics are provided so you can see how well you're doing compared to the leader and to Joe Average, whilst several pages outline the results of your actions for the four rounds in each turn. Maps are also given of the caves which your clan currently owns.

HOT TIP: for real success get out some coloured pencils and graph paper; if you can make a graphic display of the information which your Sages provide, you can deduce the easiest routes to mine, and where the larger mineral deposits are and you'll get richer a lot quicker than by randomly bumping into things.

It is also handy to note where other clans are; why dig through rock to get somewhere if you can just 'commandeer' somebody else's mining efforts? The start-up positioning of the clans in *Trollquest II* ensures that other clans are nearby you.

In the end I have to say that I really enjoyed playing *Trollquest II*. The additions have meant that it is really challenging. Although the game at first appears rather simple, the greater interactions between clans means that you will have to evolve strategies to overcome the limitations of your own clan's race, whilst exploring the weaknesses of your enemies.

Trollquest II is an impressive upgrade of *Trollquest*. A very good PBM for those interested in competition, and those wanting a change of scenery. With a manual and three free turns the start-up deal is good, and at \$3 a turn its great value for money.

Go on, try it. My Trolls could use some more fodder.■

A-Team Magic Mayhem

By a tribe of pygmies somewhere near the library

For those of you who have requested game information on the hilarious items and rituals discovered within the second A-Team storyline (which only appears alongside the first plot in the limited edition **A-Team Annual**) we present the following samples of arcane mystery, substance and things that just plain well shouldn't ever be role played with!

We would have printed statistics, but a mystic force bigger and more powerful than the *Keeper of the Manuals* has forbidden us to reveal such things so instead we are presenting such vital game information in *common*..



Spud's Special Brew (pg12)

Description: Spud's special brew is a highly lethal concoction of things best not mentioned. The brew is a very rare and highly prized poison that is available only from *Enrik's Extraneous Emporium*. A bargain at only 500 Florins a dose.

Effects: With a successful attack the brew goes quickly to work. Within seconds the victim exudes a cloud of smoke and two small glowing stars. The victim then loses consciousness.

Generic non-system specific rules that have very carefully been put in "common": The unfortunate victim must wrestle with whatever mechanism their game™ has to decide if the dose was lethal.

Notes: Most people won't touch the stuff on principle, those as ugly as Spud say they just don't like the smell.

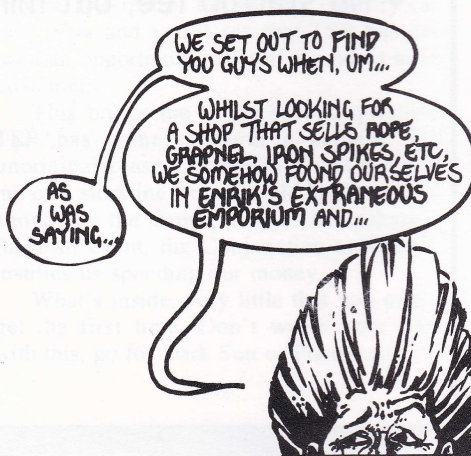
Bugby's Banal Bungalow (pg 39 & 55)

Description: This beautiful white washed six bedroom, two bathroom home comes with an attractive red shingle roof, gable and flower boxes for every window.

Effects: The bungalow has a natural form which is that of a small cube, not unlike a 6 sided dice, which upon command (known only to the most megalomaniac group member) this magically expands into a wilderness adventurer's dream home away from home.

Generic non-system specific rules that have very carefully been put in "common": No rules are necessary for this amazing piece of magical research, it simply is the most comfortable camp site you'll ever pitch.

Notes: Previous owners have left a good deal of mess in the entry hall (see page 56), the bungalow will require some cleaning.



MERCURY GAMES

TROLL QUEST II

Underground Strategy Game

Rule a clan of underworld dwellers competing for domination of the underworld. 3-D Map. Simple fill-in-the-blanks order sheet. Choice of race type. Magical artifacts with special effects. Paper, diskette and BBS turns. PC mapping program. Unique game concept.

- \$3 per turn • 20% discount via BBS • Software \$5 (optional)
- No startup fee, but min. of 5 turns (\$15) must be purchased to start a game.



SPIRAL ARM

*** IS BACK! ***

That's Right ! Just when you thought it was safe to trust your allies again...

- Lower turn fees • Turn Sheet Enhanced • Map program • Order entry program

Mercury games is now running Spiral Arm, the AustWiz game that was voted best PBM five years running, and we're making a few improvements. We're developing a mapping program that is due for release in September, and an order entry program due in December*. We have already made a few enhancements to the turn sheet layout, to make playing by mail easier. Most importantly, we will be listening to our customers, to help us improve the game. Call now to register for the next game!

* Software initially supported on PC compatibles only.

- \$5 per turn • \$20 Startup and 5 turns • All software free (when released)

Mercury Games Box N600 Sydney NSW 2000

Write to us or call Martyn on (02) 948-2216 for more details.

Fax (02) 949-5813 BBS (02) 948-7388 (9600bps)*

*Initially for PC compatibles only

THE ADVENTURES OF THE A-TEAM

BY EDGAR + DAN

NIGHT CREEPT OVER THE HORIZON, SENDING TENDRILS OF MIST TO CHASE AWAY THE SUN'S RAYS. TIRED AND WEARY THE A-TEAM FINALLY TRUDGED INTO THE LITTLE VILLAGE OF INGERSTOLDT. FEW WERE THERE TO GREET THEIR ARRIVAL FOR FEW IN THIS PLACE DARED TO FACE THE DARK.

DR. VICTOR M. WALDMAN
PHYSICIAN AND
APOCATHARY AND
HAIRDRESSER

YOU SURE THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE?

LOOK, IN THIS LITTLE PATCH OF REALITY ALL THE PRIESTS HAVE BEEN DRIVEN AWAY. THERE'S NO ONE HERE TO RESURRECT SPUD. THE BEST WE CAN HOPE FOR IS THAT THE PHYSICIAN CAN, WELL, REBUILD HIM. AND IF NOT, I COULD DO WITH A CUT AND PERM.

IT'S THE ADDRESS WE WERE GIVEN.

WELL, I THINK IT'S DISGUSTING AND IMMORAL.

CREEK

ANYONE HOME?

GAAH!

DOCTOR WALDMAN, I PRESUME?

HEE HEE HEE...

I EGOR. ZE DOCTOR IS...

SHUFF DRAG SHUFF

I AM DR. VICTOR M. WALDMAN.

WHO ARE YOU TO INTRUDE ON MY WORK?

ERM, I AM WILSON, AND THIS IS THE A-TEAM.

BELOW!

YOU WAIT, I FETCH.

UGLY LITTLE BEAST.

YEAH, WE'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE.

COULD BE SPUD'S TWIN!

YOU WILL HAVE READ ALL ABOUT US.

NEVER HEARD OF YOU.

OH.

WELL, WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP US WITH A RATHER DELICATE PROBLEM.

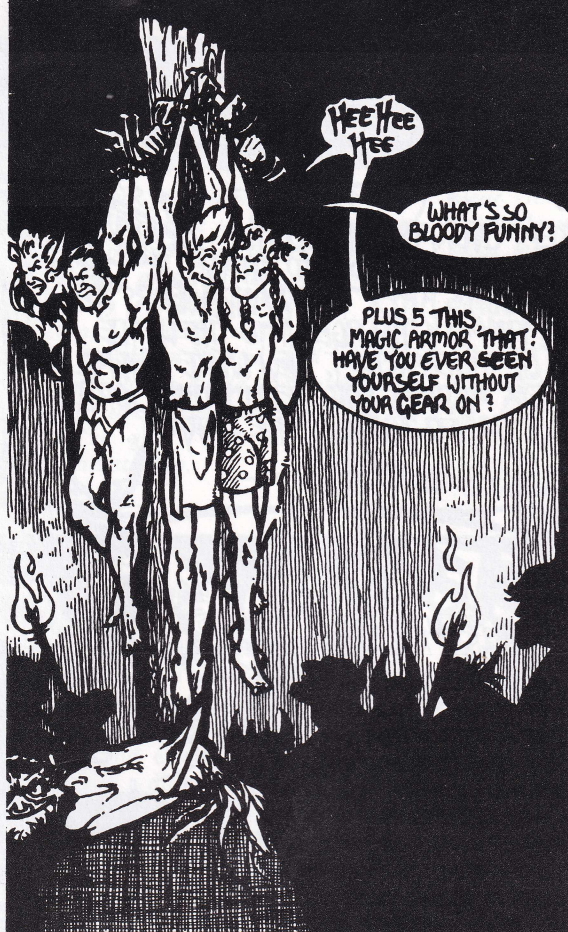
SHOW HIM, ZEEK.

YEAH! WITH BLONDE HAIR AND A TAN!

ANYONE JUMPS TO THE LEFT AND I'M OUTTA HERE!

AH! YOU VISH ME TO MAKE YOU A MAN!

ERM, NO THANKS, VOW OF CHASTITY AND ALL THAT, YOU KNOW.



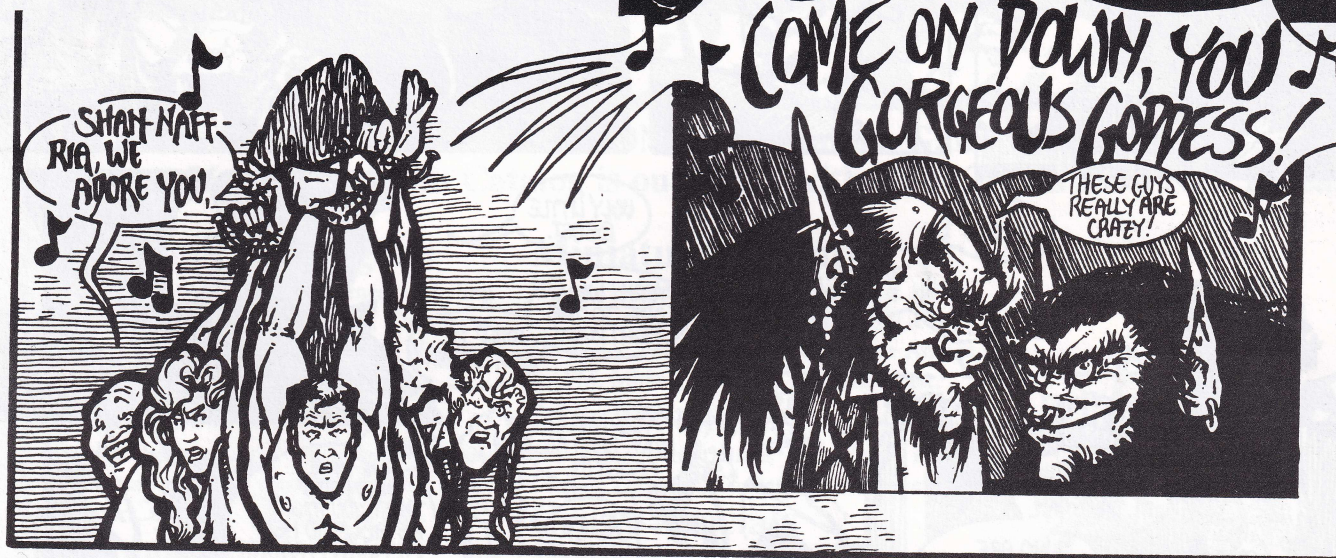
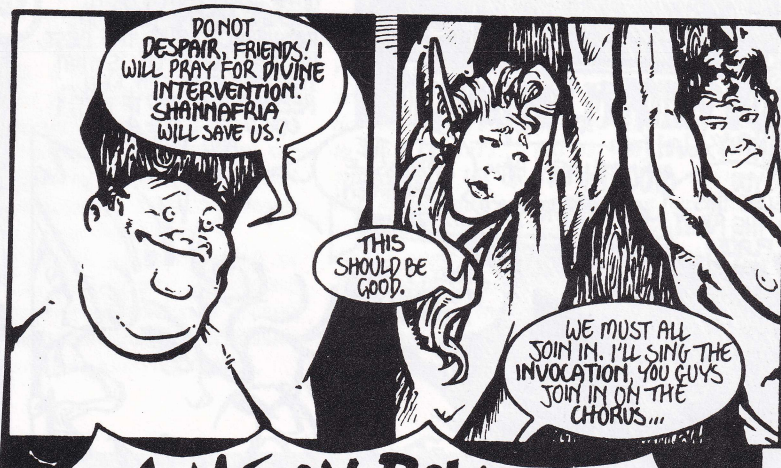
Mango's Boxer Shorts (pg 51)

Description: Mango's boxer shorts are magically endowed with the gift of self preservation. It is believed that the highly intelligent cloth from which these shorts are made has a natural aversion to, ahem, *night soil*, and so will do anything in its power to avoid *contamination*. For this reason, these innocent looking red and white polka dot shorts give anyone who wears them the life saving gift of craven cowardice.

Effects: When a dangerous foe arises such as a Demon, the ravaging hordes, magazine editors before deadlines, or Shana after she's ripped her leathers, anyone can feel threatened. By wearing these boxer shorts the owner will be whisked away by their very own legs to safety!

Generic non-system specific rules that have very carefully been put in "common": The character wearing this invaluable artifact must use whatever mechanic their game™ uses to see if they succumb to fear, and if they do they will flee the danger at thrice their normal speed.

Notes: This item is not unique to Mango. Many personalities across the multiverse seem to come into possession of Mango's Boxer Shorts.



Shannafria's Most Holy Prayer (pg 51)

Description: Just see the graphic, words can't do it justice. The music is as per the song *Shenandoah*.

Effects: Will automatically drag Shannafria away from strip-canasta, possibly seeing her in a foul mood if her favourite foes, the Asgard boys were being played.

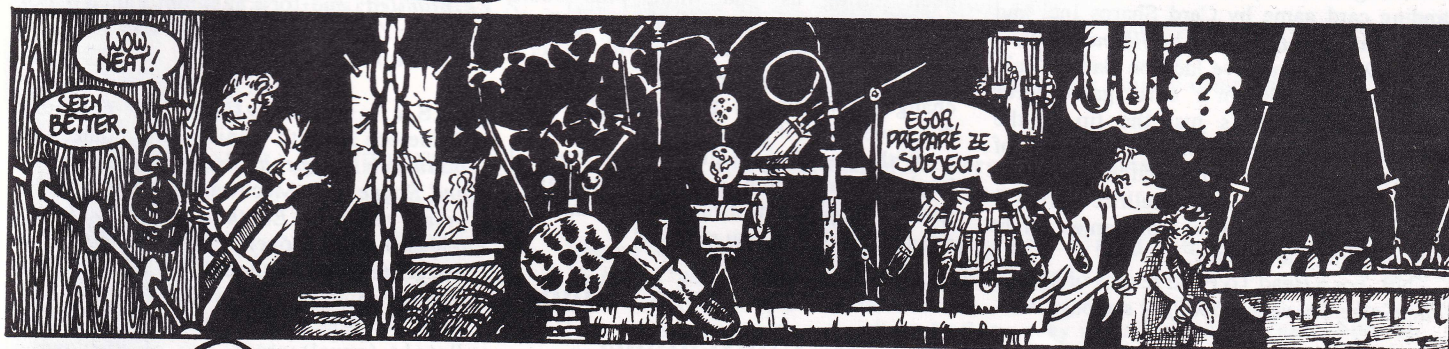
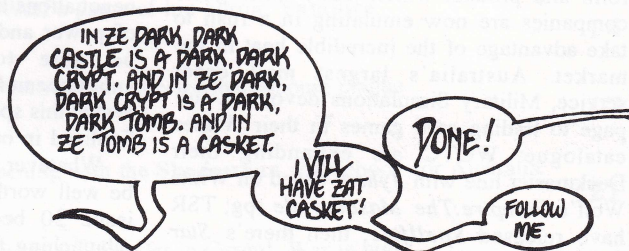
Generic non-system specific rules that we can't be sued for because it has actually, very carefully been put in "common": Use whatever mechanics your game™ use to decide if you have successfully been heard by her. Such chances will increase if suitable inducements are offered.

Notes: If Shannafria is called and a new flock has not been gathered, she may not be as forgiving as she was to Zeek (p52).

All page number references in this article are from the **A-Team Annual**.

The **Adventures of the A-Team first Annual** is available now from all good gaming shops or mail ordered direct from **Australian Realms** for \$19.95. US and New Zealand customers please add \$5.00 postage and packaging per copy (please note all amounts shown are in Australian dollars).

Send orders to Australian Realms P.O. Box 220 Morley, Western Australia 6943



NEWS

Cards: The Moneymaking

Richard Garfield and The Wizards of the Coast appear to have invented a new gaming form and product which many other game companies are now emulating in a rush to take advantage of the incredible heat in the market. Australia's largest mail order service, Military Simulations devoted a full page to trading card games in their Winter catalogue: WOTC are expanding their Deckmaster line with *Jyhad*, based on White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* rpg; TSR have released *Spellfire*; then there's *Star Trek The Next Generation* from Decipher Inc, the same people who do the How To Host A Murder games; *Super Deck* is a super-hero trading card game by Card Sharps Inc; and coming in December will be *Illuminati New World Order* from Steve Jackson Games - said to be "the collector's card game with attitude". And that's just the tip of the iceberg. When you think of the cost of development, art and production (TSR has printed over 50 million *Spellfire* cards) I wonder if some of these companies might not be riding the Titanic.

NB: For a Head To Head review of *Magic: The Gathering* versus *Spellfire* see page 36.

Cease & Desist

This issue's Editorial alluded to a recent and important incident in Australian Realms' history. After approaching TSR for their policy on our publishing articles devoted to their games, we were politely told to "...cease and desist publishing material that uses TSR copyrights and trademarks." What that means is TSR, Inc no longer want us to publish articles that use AD&D game statistics and other materials specific to TSR products. We acknowledge TSR's right to make this demand - I even understand it, they want to keep a tight control over how their products are represented to the public - but we think its a darned shame that they take this line, especially since Australian Realms outsells Dragon magazine over here and over 75% of our readers play the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* game. Of course, we will continue to provide excellent generic fantasy material that all roleplayers can use - including AD&D fans like me.

Talking About...Unae

Talking about excellent generic fantasy material, the *Unae* schedule for the next twelve months has been set out. In two issues time we'll see action from the *Ogre Clans* as they make their move to re-assert themselves. The Heletian Spine mountain range is about to spew forth great armies of ogres bent on wiping humanity off the map!

Something Exciting This Way Comes

We can't release details right now, but negotiations are going on in the back rooms of power and Australian Realms expects to be able to make a very exciting announcement over the few next issues. Watch this space for more news as details are finalised in our biggest project yet.

Whatever else does come to pass it will be well worth your while checking in with issue 20 because that is when we'll be relaunching the magazine with a change of format. These are changes we have been planning for some time taking what you've been telling us you want, plus some refinements that we've worked on ourselves. Those of you who have been with us for a while will notice some of the presentation changes have already made an appearance this issue - well it gets better!

With Australian Realms you are not just buying a magazine - you are getting a gaming supplement of high quality that you can use every time you roleplay!

Grand Openings, Clubs & Conventions

If you'd like to meet some of the fun people from Games Workshop (Tim is a veritable Peter Manning-Clark of Games Workshop history!), have a chat, and pick up a sackful of bargain priced GW products, then get along to one of two Grand Opening Days that are organised for over the next few months. *Mind Games, Melbourne* will host Games Workshop over the weekend of 24th/25th September, and it will be the Newcastle shop's turn in October. For all the Discount Coupons see White Dwarf 177.

Games Workshop, Australia are also looking to get involved with the convention scene in Australia. If you run a club or convention that incorporates GW tabletop games (*Warhammer 40,000*, *Space Marine*, *Fantasy Battle*, *Bloodbowl*, *Talisman*) then contact Ian Crabbe c/- Games Workshop, Unit 7: 7-9 Kent Road, Mascot, NSW, 2020.

A-Team Goodies

Remember we promised the *A-Team Tavern Brawl* last issue - well it had to undergo radical changes after some last minute playtesting and has been put back for a while. You should see it next issue (but I don't make those promises any more - see my editorial!). Also, the A-Team miniatures from Inquisition are well under way and we expect to be selling them mail order soon for around \$10.95 for a blister pack of six of the wackiest fantasy figures on the planet!

New Releases

Here is a selection of all the latest and upcoming releases:

Chaosium Inc: *Nephilim* an occult roleplaying game successfully released at Gencon 94 and feature reviewed this issue); *The Bronze Grimoire* for Elric!; *London Guidebook* for Cthulhu; *Beyond The Wall* coming up in October for Pendragon.

Games Workshop: New *Space Marine* figures; *Chaos Army* list for Warhammer Fantasy Battle; and the real biggie on its way out for Christmas is the relaunch of *Space Marine*, *Titan Legions* - according to Tim it looks "damned excellent".

Palladium Books Inc: *Rifts: Mindwerks* is out now; *Rifts World Book VII: South America* due in September; and *Rifts World Book VIII: Undersea* is due in October. Interestingly, this book will be written by Jolly Blackburn and John Zinser of *Shardis* magazine, I wonder if there will be more hook-ups between these two very creative teams? Also coming soon is *Aliens Unlimited* an expansion for *Heroes Unlimited*; and for Palladium Fantasy look out for *Yin-Soth Jungles* and *Old Kingdom Mountains*.

FASA Corporation: to celebrate Battletech's tenth anniversary comes the *Battletech Compendium* hardback; *Royalty and Rogues* is a Mechwarrior adventure; the great yearling *Earthdawn* rpg is being released in softcover format; *Parlainth the Forgotten City* should be out now for *Earthdawn*; *Harlequin's Back* (adventure), *Prime Runners* (NPC accessory) and *Burning Bright* (novel) are a trio of Shadowrun releases due in September.

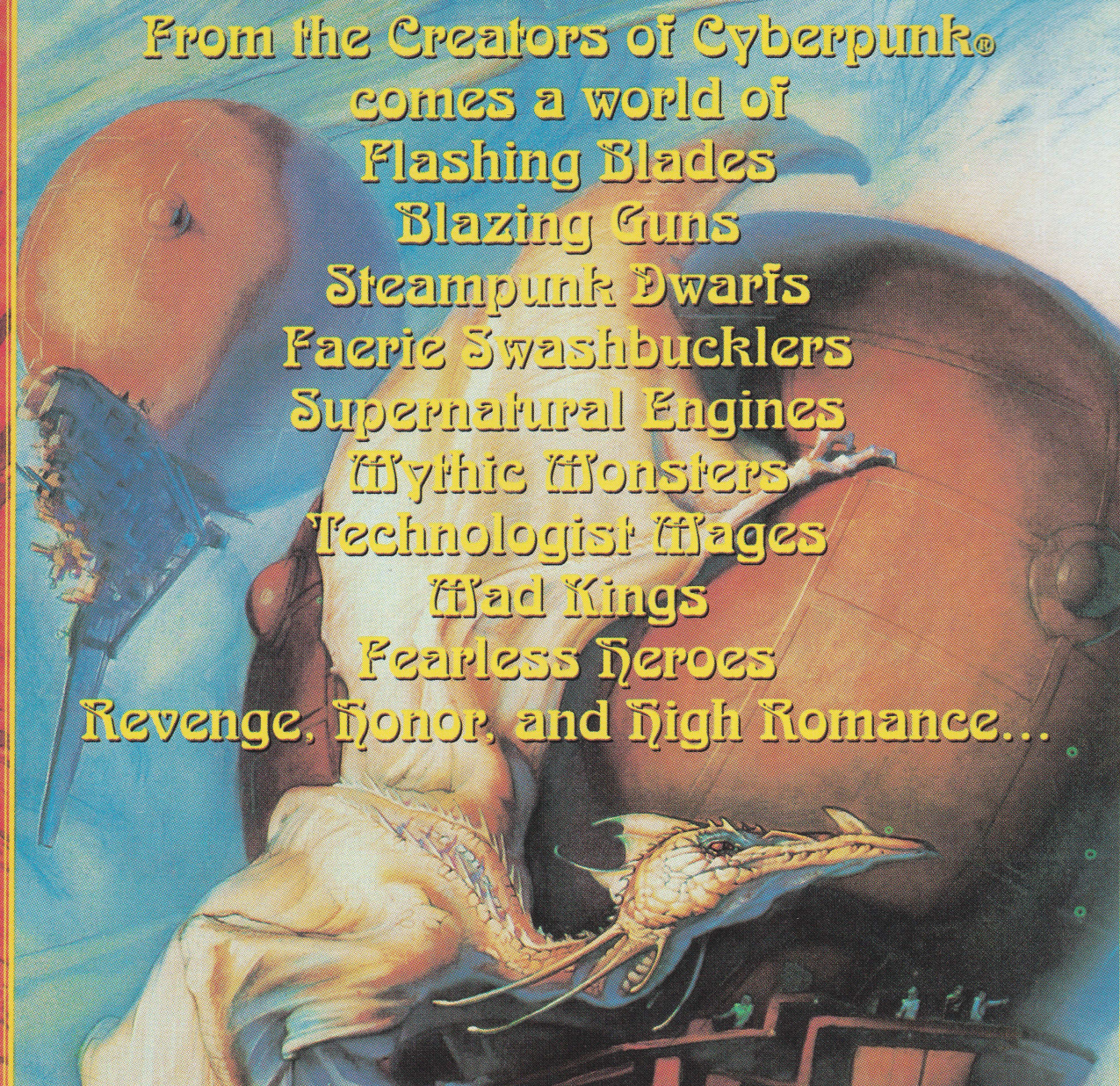
R.Talsorian Games: *Castle Falkenstein* is out NOW! For a feature review of this gorgeously graphic rpg see page 4 of this issue; the *Pacific Rim* sourcebook for Cyberpunk is on its way; *Chromebook III* will appear in October as will *Mediafront* for Cybergeneration; the *Mekton Mecha Manual Vol 1* is now on the shelves.

Steve Jackson Games: their Gencon 94 release is *In Nominee*, a translation of an award-winning French rpg; this will be followed up immediately by the *In Nomine GM Pack*. *GURPS Mage* has been delayed due to some mysterious contretemps between SJG and White Wolf, in its stead is a reprint of the popular *GURPS Grimoire* and the all new *GURPS Creatures of the Night*. The *Yamara* comic strip from Dragon magazine has been collected into a 64 page book and will be available as you read this.

TSR Inc: *Tower of Doom* Ravenloft novel and two audio CD *Endless Quest* releases are *Track of the Werewolf* and *Track of the Vampire*; look out for the *Druid's Handbook*.

White Wolf: *Rage Across Australia* - yippee! *Wraith* rpg; *LA By Night* for Vampire; & *Who's Who Among Werewolves*.

...see you round like a d100!



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